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"THINKING THROUGH THE BODY": PHASES OF FEMINISM IN ADRIENNE RICH'S LATER POETRY

BY

COLLEEN BRADSHAW

©

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Thinking Through the Body": Phases of Feminism in Adrienne Rich's Later Poetry submitted by Colleen Bradshaw in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date: Jan 31, 1986

Abstract

This thesis explores the meaning of Adrienne Rich's conception of "thinking through the body" as it develops through three phases of her poetry written between 1965 and 1981. Chapter One deals with poems from Leaflets and The Will to Change (1965-1970); in this phase of her work Rich attempts to link an understanding of nature to the process by which thinking is augmented by knowledge of the emotions and senses. Chapter Two traces Rich's poetic exploration of the mind in the first section of Diving Into The Wreck (1971-1972). In these poems, the poet moves through a depiction of conscious and unconscious dimensions of the mind, and finally posits a bisexual unconscious as the source of a body-energized awareness. Chapter Three charts Rich's vision of a thinking informed by the body as it is intrinsic to the feminist community. In these poems in The Dream of A Common Language and A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far (1974-1981), the poet moves beyond a belief in the value of acknowledging the body as a corrective or complement to thought; she now illustrates that her definition of "physicality" and its importance to thought is a process in which the aware individual comes to an understanding of herself as a participant in the larger "body" of contemporary culture.

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Introduction

In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1971), Adrienne Rich defines the process which is central to her personal and poetic development as a feminist:

> Re-vision -- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is . . . an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. 1

In re-visioning her own poetry Rich observes that, as a young poet influenced by Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Stevens and Yeats, she relied upon formalism to resolve the unanswerable questions that her poetry raised; technical control was her method of keeping her own ambivalence as a female artist just below the surface of the poems. She made it a point in the early poetry of A Change of World (1951) and The Diamond Cutters (1952), to keep art and her personal life separate. Central to Rich's maturation in the poems of the Sixties was, in her view, her decision to express her personal vision as a woman, however fragmentary and tentative, and however divergent from conventional poetic expectations of form and content.[2] From Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law (1962) to The Will to Change (1971) Rich charts her evolution towards a poetry that expresses a female rather than universal or "male" consciousness;[3] gradually this poetry breaks with traditional literary stereotypes and presents, Rich claims, the woman in the poem and the woman writing as one person.[4] Though Rich concludes her analysis and re-visioning of her work with "Planetarium" from *The Will to Change*, it is only at this point that her feminist perspective begins to unfold. In the volumes of poetry which follow *The Will to Change*, Rich's evolution as a feminist forms a complex many-faceted journey, which has been charted by a number of critics.

In "This Woman's Movement" (1975), Nancy Milford charts the growth of the poet as woman and feminist from *A Change of World* (1951) to *Diving Into The Wreck* (1973). Milford notes that Rich's commitment to feminism results in her evolution from a "precise and somewhat remote observer" of people and events in the everyday world to the explorer-poet, voice now colloquial, forms broken, images deeply private, who guides us into the female unconscious.[5] Milford emphasizes Rich's success in re-visioning the power of her "self", and by extension the self or consciousness of all women: "The power of her woman's voice crying out, *I am*: surviving, sustaining, continuing and making whole."[6]

While Milford's focus is the poetic creation of a female psyche, Marianne Whelchel in "Mining The Earth Deposits" (1980) notes Rich's interest in re-constructing the lives of women who have contributed to our cultural history and literary heritage in the actual world. Whelchel cites poems in which Rich poetically depicts and re-visions the experiences of such women as Emily Dickinson, Russian poet Natalya Gorbanevskaya, and astronomer Caroline Herschel; she observes that Rich, who begins by noting the problems of creative women, ultimately succeeds in depicting female strength as "the potential for [the] transformation of women's lives." Whelchel therefore concludes that Rich's poetry is not merely "political", but in moving beyond exploration, criticism and analysis to envision a vital new future for women, it can be named "evolutionary."[7]

For a number of critics, the essence of Rich's "evolutionary" poetry is its depiction of an integrated female or feminist consciousness. These critics may be seeing Rich's work in terms of her statement that radical feminism must "break down that fragmentation of inner and outer in every possible realm . . . ." Rich claims in an interview with Barbara and Albert Gelpi in 1974, "The psyche and the world out there are being acted on and interacting intensely all the time . . . . Once you stop splitting inner and outer worlds , you have to stop splitting all those other dichotomies . . . yourself-other, head-body . . . ."[8] Thus Jane Vanderbosch observes in "Beginning Again" (1980) that as Rich moves beyond the depiction of androgyny in Diving Into The Wreck and begins to concentrate on the special qualities of women in community in The Dream of a Common Language and A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far, the poet illustrates the ability of women to "reconstitute the world by destroying the dichotomies that have kept them separate and afraid." Vanderbosch's observation that, as Rich depicts the female community, she illustrates the connection between the physical life and the life of the mind,[9] has been re-echoed by both Wendy Martin and Mary J. Carruthers. In her 1983 article, "A Nurturing Ethos in the Poetry of Adrienne Rich", Martin attributes Rich's evolution toward "a vision which overcomes the habitual separation of mind and body, self and other" to the poet's "understanding and acceptance of the profound connection between nature and human life."[10] Mary J. Carruthers in "The Re-vision of The Muse" (1983) connects the portrayal of the integration of body and mind, what she describes as "the primary energy of the senses which is both physical and intellectual" with Rich's attempt to mythologize lesbianism.[11]

Vanderbosch, Martin and Carruthers all attempt to explicate Rich's experimentation with a mythology and a poetics which could successfully accommodate her desire to depict an integration of mind and body. However, all of these critics concentrate on the later stages of Rich's evolution, those poems in Diving Into The Wreck, The Dream of a Common Language and A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far. This process of finding an appropriate imagery and charting a way of life in which all the aspects of self are fused has been central not only to Rich's more recent poetry, but also to the earliest feminist poetry. Further, what neither Carruthers nor other critics of Rich's feminist evolution have dealt with is the fact that, though integration of mind and body seems to be the poet's ultimate goal, she does not, for the most part, focus equally on the importance of body and mind in her depiction of the radical feminist consciousness. Her poetry has, rather, explored images which both expand our understanding of the female body, and emphasize the importance, to both men and women, of an awareness of the physical aspects of self; these images, in which the body functions as a corrective to contemporary consciousness, suggest ways of augmenting thought with the knowledge of the senses and of the emotions. The following passage from Of Woman Born illustrates that for Rich the recognition of the importance and meaning of the body must be central to any conception of an integration of body and mind, and to the creation of a feminist consciousness:

> I have come to believe . . . that female biology . . . has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality

> as a resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life we require not only *control* of our bodies (though control is a prerequisite); we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.[12]

Rich's position has been considered "extreme", as well as "sibylline and perplexing" by critics such as Elaine Showalter.[13] Showalter seems to be in agreement with Ann Rosalind Jones who, in her study of the French feminist concept of "writing the body", concludes that such a position is "theoretically fuzzy" and "idealist."[14] However, I hope to show that, as Rich explores the process which she calls "thinking through the body",[15] her project to inform thought with an understanding of the body is neither vague nor idealist; rather, as Rich seeks images to express her feminist goals, the poetry increasingly moves towards the practical concerns of women as they participate in the actual world.

The process whereby Rich attempts to depict "thinking through the body" occurs in three stages. In the poetry of *Leaflets* and *The Will To Change*, "thinking through the body" is explored in terms of the meaning of nature and female biology; in *Diving Into The Wreck*, Rich constructs a bisexual unconscious as a potential source of images that might express her vision of a "feeling-thinking"; in *The Dream of A Common Language* and *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, Rich conceives of a thinking augmented by a knowledge of the body as not only the acknowledgement of the importance of the body, but as a broader concept of "physicality." Physicality, re-visioned as the individual's awareness of her *actual*, as opposed to conditioned, needs as she participates in the everyday world, becomes the ultimate female strength, a strength that Rich depicts in the context of the feminist community.

Rich's conception of "thinking through the body" has parallels with the French feminist Hélène Cixous' aim to "write the body." Both Rich and Cixous are concerned with the problems that arise in articulating a female consciousness within the current structures of language. In 1968 in a poem entitled "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children", Rich addresses the post-structuralist premise that the "self" is inscribed in the structures of language, and that language has primacy over thought itself.[16] Rich concludes in this poem that there is no autonomous self; she claims that she herself is only a product of culture and language, and cannot escape its confines. Similarly Cixous has observed:

> Indeed, as soon as we are, we are born into language and language speaks in us, language dictates its law, which is a law of death . . . 17

However, both Rich and Cixous have determined to "re-vision" or re-conceive language in order to express their feminist visions. Rich has stated:

> Poetry is, among other things, a criticism of language. In setting words together in new configurations, in the mere, immense shift from male to female pronouns, in the relationships between words created by echo, repetition, rhythm, rhyme, it lets us see and hear our words in a new dimension . . . in sensuous form. 18

Both women believe that a language that expresses the body can transform our conceptions of life. Cixous ~~describes~~ describ "writing the body" in the following way:

> A woman's body, with its thousand and one threshholds of ardor -- once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that

> run through it in every direction -- will make the old single-grooved mother-tongue reverberate with more than one language. 19

Cixous has, however, been criticized for her overly-theoretical and elitist position as a writer who sees women's liberation primarily in terms of the text, rather than in the light of everyday living.[20] Rich differs from Cixous in this matter, for while Rich recognizes the central role that language plays in our definitions and experience of "consciousness", she aims to utilize language as a tool for the practical goal of articulating and transforming woman's experience in the actual world.

Like the American feminist Mary Daly, Rich has focused on distinguishing between the actual and the culturally-determined female experience in the everyday world, in order to recover an authentic female "self." For both women, this process involves the subversion of the stereotypical quest myth, which symbolizes the cyclic, "robotized" patterns of patriarchal thought. Daly has described the feminist quest, as a diversion from the traditional quest, in Gyn/Ecology (1978):

> Journeying centerward is Self-centering movement in all directions. It erases pseudodichotomies between the Self and "other" reality, while it unmasks the unreality of both "self" and "world" as these are portrayed, betrayed in the language of the fathers' foreground . . . 21

For both Daly and Rich the quest to define or discover a female "self" is an inward, ever-changing process, which has its basis in "re-membering": Daly, like Rich, defines this term not only as the activation of the female memory of repressed or ignored feelings and thoughts; Daly also believes, as does Rich, that the body itself, its very "members", must be acknowledged: "as our senses become more alive, we can see/hear/feel how we have been tricked by [patriarchal] texts . . . ."[22] These feminists prophesy that, as woman becomes more aware of her situation, she will gain the insight to move beyond conventional knowing (what Daly has named "robotitude"),[23] and gain access to new vistas of consciousness. Daly's "ludic cerebration . . . the free play of the intuition in our own space, giving rise to thinking that is vigorous, informed, multi-dimensional, independent, creative, tough . . . which affirms that everything is connected"[24] is similar to Rich's vision of the active processes of awareness that can be tapped through the female sensibility:

> Thinking is an active, fluid, expanding process; intellection, "knowing", are recapitulations of past processes. In arguing that we have by no means yet explored or understood our biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings, I am really asking whether women cannot begin at last to *think through the body* . . . . [25]

Further, in some of her experiments with language, particularly the processes of re-naming the experiences that arise from the radical female perspective, Rich is again closer to Daly than Cixous. Though all three writers believe, to use Daly's words, that woman must reclaim the right to name,[26] Rich and Daly move beyond theorizing and actively seek new words, or re-vision old words, to express a feminist vision.

There are similarities between the feminist aim to define an authentic experience and the poetic aspirations of Charles Olson. In *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry* (1980), Paul A. Bové has explicated the poetic aims of Olson, who "is not trying to project something ideal, but rather to re-enact something earthly, radically local and radically temporal -- i.e. a man's encounter with the particularities of his experience, his environment and the history of his locale."[27] "The poem and the poet, as well as the eye and mind of the reader" are, Bové goes on, "constantly in motion" as Olson works against a culture and literary tradition which "lulls and greases the mind and senses so that the poet is not even aware that there are normal mental and sensual functions which are being denied him. But when the society and its support, its ground, that is, 'tradition', begins to disintegrate, then its pernicious cover-up becomes clear."[28]

In his essay "Projective Verse", Olson discusses the formal techniques to be utilized in this process of tapping the "whole" experience, rather than the fragmentary one that culture and language encourage. Rich, who acknowledges Charles Olson in the epigraph to The Will To Change,[29] has experimented with the projectivist techniques in much of her poetry, though with significant divergences. Olson's central concern is that "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception."[30] This achieves a sense of immediacy; as images develop, constantly changing direction, the effect is one of the momentum and energy of the discovering, sensate and sensitive consciousness. Similarly Rich, in exploring Olson's theories in The Will to Change, has, as noted by Albert Gelpi, juxtaposed images to illustrate "how her mind occupies the world in which and on which it operates."[31] This process becomes a feature of much of Rich's subsequent poetry. Further, Rich, like Olson, sees her work as an on-going self-discovery process.[32] She also seems to agree with him that "form is merely an extension of content."[33] Paul Christensen explains this belief in the following way: "Olson refers to this principle . . . only to suggest that traditional forms are imposed by conventions which preserve the separations of self and world . . . by the act of freeing the words of the poem to assume their own particular configurations, semantic and typographical, the poet is discovering his own uniqueness."[34] However, what is also central to Olson's conception of the link between form and content is his belief in an organically developing poem.[35] Here he and Rich differ; she naturally does manipulate words, like Olson, to break with contemporary notions of "knowing." But Rich's images, in imitating the energized female consciousness, are not an organic composition; they are, rather, deliberately interconnected, and even explained, elaborated upon, for Rich's goal is not only to illustrate the processes of the mind; she also seeks to articulate more specifically than Olson a set of values, feminist values. Another difference between Olson and Rich is that the latter does not place her greatest emphasis on the sound and rhythm of the poem. Nor is Rich as interested in the shape that the poem takes on the page. Rather, the collage-like effect that Rich develops in combining dense image patterns with a mixture of prose, lines of poetry, dialogue and diary entries illustrates the predominant concern she shares with Olson, a concern with change and process, experimentation and particularity, the characteristics, according to Bové, of an "open" rather than "closed" form poetics.[36]

The complexity of this form, mirroring what Rich describes in "Origins and History of Consciousness" as "acute particularity",[37] and diverging, like Olson's, from traditional concepts of art as a permanent, ideal order,[39] does present some serious difficulties in interpretation, undoubtedly because of the emphasis on subjective rather than universalized experience. This may be why there have been few in-depth accounts of the evolution of Rich's feminist poetry. A first priority, then, will be to provide a detailed analysis of the key poems in the phases of Rich's work as I have articulated them. The poet's exploration is not a linear process; in each stage of her quest she encounters difficulties with both her definition and poetic expression of "thinking through the body". However, these difficulties provide Rich with the impetus to re-conceive her goals and methods in an ever-expanding vision of the significance of the body and its relationship to feminist values.

Chapter I: Re-visioning Nature

In Leaflets[1] (1965-68) and The Will To Change[2] (1968-70), the first phase of Rich's exploration , "thinking through the body" is presented as a process of re-discovering the meaning of nature and re-defining its relationship to human activity. Rich begins the quest with the premise that woman, because of her biological functions, has access to a profound knowledge of her body and emotions.[3] However, because of her physicality, a source of new life and of knowledge, woman has been associated, whether in myth or in daily living, with the processes of nature. This cultural assumption has resulted in her subordinate role in patriarchy, a culture that, according to Rich, denies the life of the body. The denial of the resources and insights that woman might provide has led to the near-collapse of culture:

> We have been perceived for too many centuries as pure Nature, exploited and raped like the earth and the solar system; small wonder if we now long to become Culture: pure spirit, mind. Yet it is precisely this culture and its political institutions which has split us off from itself. In so doing it has also split itself off from life, becoming the death culture of quantification, abstraction, and the will to power which has reached its most refined destructiveness in this century. 4

For Rich, then, it follows that "nature" mediated through the female sensibility must be re-instated if woman is to work against the sterility and destructiveness of contemporary culture.

Rich's concern with nature as it is related to culture is an issue basic to much feminist study. Sherry B. Ortner, for example, explores the source of woman's oppression as it is rooted in the cultural interpretation of her biology. In her article "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", Ortner cites Simone de Beauvoir, who observes in The Second Sex that "the female to a greater extent than the male is the prey of the species." Ortner elaborates: "It is simply a fact that proportionately more of a woman's body space, for a greater percentage of her lifetime . . . is taken up with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species."[5] For this reason woman is considered by her culture to be "closer to nature." Ortner continues, "The male, in contrast, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally . . . ."[6] Thus, since maleness is generally associated with the activities of culture, woman is not only closer to nature, but is also less involved with or aligned with culture. Her social roles and her psyche are shaped to a large extent by this categorization. Woman is in general associated with domestic responsibilities -- the home and child-rearing; as a result, according to Ortner, who draws on Nancy Chodorow's studies of women, her psyche is characterized by "personalism and particularism."[7]

Yet as the bearer of children, and the one most responsible for their acquisition of social skills, woman does have a cultural responsibility, which is interpreted in a number of ways, even in a given culture. Woman may be seen as caught, because of her reproductive function, between nature and culture, and is therefore regarded as inferior. She may be seen as "mediator" between nature and culture; that is, in her role as mother, the woman is believed to transform the "natural", the child, into a culturally-desirable adult. This socializing process is essential to civilization, and for this reason, the activities of the woman as "synthesizing agent" are often controlled -- in terms of, for example, permissible sexual activities and allowable role choices. Thirdly, woman's presumed closeness to nature can encompass what Ortner describes as "symbolic ambiguity"; because of her intermediate position between nature and culture, woman may be perceived simultaneously as both witch and goddess, death and life.[8] Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex describes this ambivalence:

> Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her; she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will. 9

Therefore, as Ortner and de Beauvoir conclude, woman can be seen as a threat to the will of man, and to the cohesion of culture, or as an essential requirement for the integration of both nature and culture, self and other.

In her poetic exploration of the meaning of nature, Rich initially depicts the effect that patriarchal "ambiguity" or "ambivalence" toward both nature and woman has had on the female's present sense of identity. Woman is, it seems, torn between the knowledge of her powerful physicality and her recognition that, whether worshipped or reviled, she is nevertheless powerless, defined and controlled by patriarchal culture. Her identity, then, grounded as it is in her body, results in a double conflict: on the one hand, woman feels a division between herself and this predominantly male culture; on the other hand, since she does participate, however minimally, in patriarchy, a culture in which mind dominates, she experiences a further division within herself between mind and body. However, the alienation that woman is depicted as experiencing in the early poems of this phase is gradually transformed as the poet strives to "get thought and feeling out of the old cycles . . . a process which will leave neither surfaces nor depths unchallenged, which enters society at the most essential level of the subjugation of women and nature by men."[10] In order to **transcend poetically** woman's present identity, the poet re-defines not only woman's relationship to nature, but also, through the gradually developing and changing definition of nature in the poems, she re-conceives the importance of nature to culture.

Rich begins her definition of nature in two early poems in which nature and culture are in opposition. In "5:30 a.m." (Leaflets), Rich compares femaleness to animal existence; woman's physicality results in her personal vitality, but she is, like an animal, "hunted" by culture. In the sequel poem, "Abnegation" (Leaflets), the woman, Rich claims, "could be" more animal than human, more in tune with nature than culture; however, it is clear that the poet yearns for an animal vitality and living-in-the-moment that is incompatible with the "self"-consciousness of human civilization. In "Planetarium" (The Will To Change) and "Tear Gas" (Uncollected Poems 1957-1969), Rich begins to re-define and re-evaluate nature and to integrate it as much as possible into the structures of culture. She now conceives of nature as the translation of the "pulsations" of the body into intuition and emotion. In "Images for Godard" (The Will To Change) and "Valediction Forbidding Mourning" (The Will To Change), Rich explores the means of creating an aesthetics which can fully express these physical and emotional impulses.

What is central to Rich's definition of nature is that, as she tries to go beyond cultural conceptions that have pre-empted our knowledge of nature, she more and more comes to see culture and nature as irreconcilable. The vitality of the woman in "5:30 a.m.", the special powers of the astronomer in "Planetarium", the courage of the persona in "Tear Gas" who must step into "the male / field of violence" are all examples of profound natural insights which are, though validated by Rich, repudiated by their culture. All of these women remain outsiders because of the natural sources of their thinking. Rich, recognizing in "Images" that culture not only holds nature at bay but also represses it, determines to step beyond its structures to re-discover a natural human source for thinking. As she puts this into practice in "Valediction", the poet goes so far as to reject almost entirely the conventions of language, conventions which form the underpinnings of culture. The challenge that Rich faces is whether it is possible, without the conventional tools for communication, to express a vision of nature meaningful to others as well as to herself.

"5:30 a.m." (1967), the first poem in Rich's re-definition of nature, compares the experiences of woman to those of a fox pursued by a hunter. The poet illustrates that the woman is closer to nature than to culture; she suggests that woman should live as much as possible according to the cycles of her body. However, there are rewards and extreme dangers intrinsic in such a decision.

The woman presented in the poem has both a natural and cultural dimension. Though "birds" and "periodic blood" link woman with nature, "old recapitulations",[11] the woman's summarizing of the terms of her life upon the arrival of her period, links her to culture, and to the human tendency to interpret nature and natural phenomena.

In deciding to reject the "pills / for bleeding, pills for panic" (Leaflets, p.31) which would alter the natural state of the body, it seems that the poet-persona is choosing as much as possible to negate all that is cultural and therefore "unnatural." However, in rejecting the antidotes and preventatives provided by culture, the woman puts herself at the mercy of her body; it can lead her, as it can the fox, to freedom or confinement, to life or to death.

In juxtaposing the woman's periodic blood with the fox's "trails of blood", Rich suggests that the woman, in the natural, undrugged state that her period symbolizes, has escaped pregnancy as the fox escapes death. The blood of both woman and fox represents their vitality and their will to survive. The poet-persona claims that both she and the fox are "beautiful", and she is amazed by the feats of both:

> our miracle escapes,
> our whiplash panic flogging us on
> to new miracles! (Leaflets, p.31)

Perhaps these escapes are miraculous because neither are controlled by the mind; the fox and the poet, it seems, have access to the spontaneous energies of the body.

However, the poet also presents the alternative fate of both woman and fox. The woman, in trying to be attuned to her body, may get pregnant; and pregnancy, in the ways that culture, that the medical profession, treat it, is an alienating experience:

> dull needle groping in the spinal fluid,
> weak acid in the bottom of the cup,
> foreboding, foreboding. (Leaflets, p.31)

The dull needle and weak acid are in contrast with the earlier "whiplash" escapes, though even this fate, since it is the natural repercussion of the body, is preferable to the pills that culture offers. The fate of the pregnant woman is compared to the death of the fox, captured at last by the hunter:

> No one tells the truth about truth,
> That it's what the fox
> sees from his scuffled burrow:
> dull-jawed, onrushing
> killer . . . . (Leaflets, p.31)

Such an existence is "truth", it seems, because it involves a direct confrontation with life and death. For this reason it is dangerous but uplifting. However, the fact remains that the emphasis in the poem is on death, and the poet does not make clear why pregnancy, the engendering of new life, would be so closely connected with the death of the fox. Perhaps, like Susan Gilbert, Rich believes that "the confinement of pregnancy replicates the confinement of society."[12] Hence, the operation itself, in which the woman is at the mercy of the doctors, in which her natural strengths are diminished by the accepted cultural practices, imposes a kind of death sentence on her spirit.

Rich concludes the poem:

> being that
> inanely single-minded
> will have our skins at last. (Leaflets, p.31)

The ambiguity of "inanely single-minded" suggests the phrase applies to both hunter-culture and fox-poet, perhaps because the poet feels that the polarization of nature and culture is a destructive one. However, if this split is destructive, the poet only chooses to indicate how the fox-poet will be destroyed -- the hunter will have her "skin." Further, Rich offers no viable solution to the female dilemma -- the trap of her biological functions. The woman, as Rich makes clear, is capable of neither the "instinct" of the fox, nor of its freedom. No matter how vital she may be in refusing the pills, she is doomed to be "hunted"; in fact, she faces a kind of death as surely if she takes the pills as if she refuses. Further, the drugs, other than being unnatural, do save the woman from the literal or figurative death that she feels is imposed by pregnancy. This pull between drugged and undrugged consciousness, birth control and pregnancy, remains unresolved. The repetitions throughout the poem of "blood", "pills", "foreboding" and "truth" emphasize, as does the broken rhythm of the poem, the pulsing of the blood, the heaving of the breath that mirror her fear as she struggles between the pull of nature and culture.

In "Abnegation" (1968), the poet is more accepting of the supremacy of culture. Whether she likes it or not, culture does take precedence over nature. Rich never condones the male civilization that estranges women and nature alike; she now more readily admits her participation in that society, but at the same time yearns for a more "natural" way of life.

In this poem, the fox, again associated with the female experience, is "a vixen / dancing in the half-light."[13] She is "sexy" and "Egyptian-supple in her sharpness." "In her nerves the past / sings, a thrill of self-preservation" (Leaflets, p.38). This predominantly physical existence is contrasted with the male culture, a culture of the mind: "the dreams of dead vixens, / the apotheosis of Reynard, / the literature of fox-hunting" (Leaflets, p.38). The fox, a part of the natural world, does not have the need for dreams, deification, literature, as do thinking beings.

Further, the vixen-fox has no sense of time, of past or present. Everything is experienced in the moment. For this reason the fox's present is "immaculate." For Rich, animal existence seems to embody a pure source of origin, a vitality and integration with one's surroundings that she implies have been lost in the "self"-conscious culture.

While the fox "springs toward her den", Rich, a participant of the male culture, is on her way to a house "nailed together by Scottish/Covenanters" (Leaflets, p.38). Her "instinct" is "mortified" by, it seems, the activities of consciousness which are a part of culture; religious archives, heirlooms, birthrights, even the so-called "virgin" forest, are constructions of a culture, imposed upon the natural environment; the Covenanters have nailed their lives together and chopped meaning into the hills through an act of will. It is the fox, free of the trappings of consciousness, who is regarded by the poet as truly alive, a totality of being. Though once more the fox has "no future / except death", Rich declares "I could be more / her sister than theirs" (Leaflets, p.38).

The "could be" seems to express both Rich's yearning for the natural existence of the animal, and her awareness of the extent to which she cannot achieve it. She is, she implies, more body than mind, more natural than cultural; however, "could be" also admits that though she wants to be like the fox, she is not; her instincts, as she has stated, are, unlike the fox's, "mortified."

Compared with the earlier poem, in which body rhythms predominate, the structure of "Abnegation" relies on logical progression of thought, and on the "rational" analysis of animal and human activities. This emphasizes, whether Rich intended it or not, that the poet is a thinking being and a participant in her culture. The animal, its "presentness", its "vitality", is beyond the "wildest" human possibility; however, Rich clearly yearns for a human version of the fox's "immaculate present."

Since it seems that nature, as a life of animal instinct, is in conflict with the thought processes of human beings, in "Planetarium" (1968) in The Will To Change Rich attempts to re-define the meaning of nature in a way that links it to female thought, female experience. In this poem Rich creates a portrait of Caroline Herschel, the female astronomer; she attempts to illustrate that the intellectual achievements of Herschel -- and by extension all women -- have their basis in woman's closeness to nature.

The staggered rhythm of the poem is imitative of the female astronomer's eye moving from star to star, trying to discern the shapes of the constellations. Similarly, Rich's "inner" eye moves from image to image, thought to emotion, trying to make known what is unknown, trying to define the bonds between woman and nature. The constellations, "galaxies of women" in the shapes of "monsters",[14] suggest the male vision of woman, a being both powerful and feared, a "witch" who must be controlled, like nature, by the ordering processes of culture. Hence these women in the skies are "doing penance for impetuousness" (Will, p.13). More nature than culture, more body than mind, they are subordinate to the male "spaces of the mind" (Will, p.13).

But these "natural" sources of feminity are what allowed Herschel - "she whom the moon ruled / like us / levitating into the night sky / riding the polished lenses" -- to make her astronomical discoveries (Will, p.13).

Further, Herschel, and, by extension, all women, are described as constituting a powerful, concentrated consciousness:

> every impulse of light exploding
> from the core
> as life flies out of us (*Will*, p.13)

Femaleness is, it seems, associated with fire and energy; like the stars, female consciousness burns brightly and intensely. Tycho, the male astronomer, is perceived as the unbalanced one, not the witch. In "the mad webs of Uranisborg" he is but an "eye" "encountering the NOVA" (*Will*, p.14).

Woman, who is also the NOVA, the new star, has not been truly discovered or described. She is more complex than any male discovery -- lasar, pulsar, radio impulse. She is a "galactic cloud", "an instrument in the shape / of a woman"; she is the feminist poet trying to "translate pulsations / into images." She is bombarded by all the data of culture, but is herself, as a woman, "the most accurately transmitted . . . language in the universe" (*Will*, p.14). In spite of this portrait of a complex, concentrated being, the poet also asserts that woman is "untranslatable" and "involuted." Yet the poet implies that the understanding of femaleness will transform our conceptions of nature and culture, will allow for "the relief of the body / and the reconstruction of the mind" (*Will*, p.14).

In "Tear Gas", a poem written a year later in 1969, Rich posits that the first step in woman's understanding of herself is the expression of her emotional experiences. This will be her bond with nature. As she puts it in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-vision":

> If we have come to the point . . . when women can stop being haunted, not only by "convention and propriety," but by internalized fears of being and saying themselves, then it is an extraordinary moment 15

Emotion, what Judith McDaniel has termed the "subjective physical self", is "now seen as the focus for profound political change."[16] As Rich illustrates, woman's experiences are not the "old ideas of a revolution"; instead, the female poet-persona declares, "my politics is in my body."[17] Her politics is a "natural" response, a feeling-thinking that diverges completely from the male emphasis on mind.

To illustrate these possibilities, the poem is based on a comparison between the poet-persona, a woman who must break free of patriarchal oppression, and the political demonstrators at Fort Dix who, in 1969, protested against the treatment of G.I. prisoners. Rich, like the demonstrators, must overcome the fear that is associated with rejecting cultural structures of authority. She must "demonstrate" her female vision , which is her rebellion against patriarchy.

The tears of both the poet-persona and the demonstrators are a natural reaction to a cultural phenomenon. The demonstrators cry because they have been gassed; Rich's tears "run wild" in response to the cultural affliction that surrounds her -- "cesspool -- / stricken brooks", "violence licking at old people and / children" (Poems, p.139). Out of this crying comes a profound relief that is physical and emotional: "that your body was here, / you had done it, every last refusal was over." Further, the rationalizations of culture -- "false pride, false indifference, false / courage" -- have been defeated by the natural impulse (Poems, p.139).

However, as the poem develops, Rich raises a further problem in her search for a union of "natural" and "cultural" impulses, the problem of expressing this "thinking through the body" with language. When the poet declares that she is "alone, alone with language / and without meaning" (Poems, p.139), she intimates that inherent in the structures of language is the separation of body and mind, natural impulse and cultural manifestation. The processes of language are patterns of thought, patterns of culture; yet to express her feelings, her insights, the poet requires a word "that will shed itself like a tear / onto the page / leaving its stain" (Poems, p.140). She implies that only when words are as physical and substantial as a tear will she fulfill her goal, communicate her vision, and move her listener. She suggests that it is only when language has changed that the world can change, with the force of an axe breaking down a door. The old "keys", "the old ideas of ~~a~~ revolution . . . the good society" (Poems, p.140), seemed possible goals because they were creations of the mind, but in fact have remained ideas, unactualized. On the other hand, she claims, "my politics is in my body, accruing and expanding with every / act of resistance and each of my failures." The body is not "complete", it is not fully understood, but the poet nevertheless insists "the will to change begins in the body not in the mind" (Poems, p.140).

To express the body in the medium of the mind, which is in this case, words, requires, Rich claims, that language be both physical like "a hand" and visual, a "language like pigment released on the board / blood-black, sexual green, reds . . ." (Poems, p.140). Yet the poet claims in despair, "These images are not what I mean" (Poems, p.141). In the poem's final section she shifts her emphasis from the images which she has found inadequate to a more direct expression of emotion. She rejects "completeness" and aesthetic order, instead expressing the confusion of her personal fears. Apparently addressing a man with whom she is intimately involved, she expresses one feeling after another in a rush like tears falling:

> That she wants to have your child, that I want us to have mercy
> on each other
> that I want to take her hand
> that I see you changing (Poems, p.141)

Her expression of emotion, like the courage of the demonstrators at Fort Dix, is the truth of her personal experience, and a symbol of her rebellion against patriarchy. Further, by linking her tears with those of the demonstrators, Rich implies that at the core of our cultural activities is this basic "politics of the body." Moreover, though emotions are often uncertain and seem incomplete from a more rational perspective, they bear a truth of their own: Rich believes that even her "repetitions are beating their way / toward a place . . . where [her] body will no longer demonstrate outside [the male] stockade" (Poems, p.141). Her emotions, she implies, will finally carry her to another way of knowing, of living. Rich suggests that when her body is set free, she will be capable of a complete transformation of identity. She can "wheel" toward "another kind of action." This is female action, and fear is involved because personal involvement is essential; but the poet maintains, "it's not the worst way to live" (Poems, p.141).

In sum, "Tear Gas" appears to claim that emotions are a way of knowing that the "male" culture denies. The poet indicates that emotion can be a means of integrating body and mind, and is a bridge between an indefinable nature and a too-conscious culture. Further, if there is to be a bridge between nature and culture, language must be of the body as well as the mind. In evaluating this claim, it must be said that "Tear Gas" does, in many ways, embody Rich's vision of a more physical, more emotional language. In spite of the poet's claim that emotion is more important than any poem, "Tear Gas" is powerful because its seemingly unstructured form, the intimate tone, the climactic image of a woman transformed into a bird, all illustrate that emotion can be expressed with words.

Rich's frustration with language in "Tear Gas", whether it seems justified or not, is crucial in her continuing exploration. In "Images for Godard" (1970) in The Will To Change, the poet's concern with language leads her to experiment with an aesthetics that can express nature, understood, as in "Tear Gas", to comprise the emotions. In order to counteract the cerebral effects of language, the poet utilizes the fluid, ever-changing effects of film. As she does so, her concern with the depiction of physicality and of emotion as the human connection with nature is transformed; she now conceives of nature in terms of an even more basic human source, a "natural" source underlying emotion itself, which she names "the moment of change."

Section one of this five-part poem is based on a quotation from Wittgenstein in which the sterility of language is described:

> Our language can be seen as an ancient city:
> a maze of little streets and squares, of old
> and new houses with additions from various
> periods; and this surrounded by a multitude
> of new boroughs with straight regular streets
> and uniform houses. 18

Rich then transforms this statement into a movie-like poem, in which she is "driving to the limits / of the city of words", observing that the landscape of language becomes increasingly sterile, like "suburbs", and superficial, transient, like "squatters" waiting to be evicted. Finally she reaches "the limits" of this city of language: here where words fail, she declares, "my face must have a meaning."[19] The face, usually the focus of attention in person to person communication, will no longer have recourse to words as a source of meaning. Instead, physical expressiveness must, Rich implies, take precedence over the abstractions of language. The face is now more closely aligned with the body than with the mind; only the body can express, Rich implies, the actual person.

She states, "To know the extremes of light / I sit in this darkness" (Will, p.47) as, in section two of the poem, she imitates the fluidity of film to suggest the way that the body and language might be united again. Her portrayal of the "present flashing" (Will, p.47) emphasizes the impact of objects in their shape and their movement on the consciousness:

> The sea glittering in the sun
> The swirls of nebula
>
> in the espresso cup
> raindrops, neon spectra
>
> on a vinyl raincoat (Will, p.48)

The swirling sea becoming the grounds in the espresso cup becoming the neon spectra suggests the sensuous apprehensions of the mind as it is "washed over" by strongly visual images.

In section three Rich takes the sensuous response of the mind a step further. She now considers an aesthetics of "love, to move perpetually / as the body changes" (Will, p.48). This creative process differs from the flow of visual images depicted in section two because the eye of the artist is not just absorbing the physical data of the outside world. Now, in depicting love, "the eye [is] sunk inward . . . bleeding with speech" (Will, p.48). The alert mind is not only grasping the physical realities of the world around it; the mind is also in touch with the "inner" life of the body. In depicting physical love,the poet suggests that the artist can illustrate a depth of communication and understanding between two people that surpasses mere sensual contact. Rich states, "shoot the same scene / over and over" (Will, p.48), for she believes that this series of images has more potential for communication than any other.

In the following section, Rich elaborates further on the depiction of love. Godard's Alphaville is an unsuccessful film, in the poet's opinion, because it shirks from attempting to portray love as the all-encompassing human emotion that Rich believes it to be. The "real" film, that is, the film willing to depict love, would not end as Alphaville does with a woman saying "I love you". This scene from Godard presents love as merely an idea; it does not convey the actualities of love, which, for Rich, embrace "horror and war and sickness", as well as the purely physical experience of love: "to touch the breast / for a woman . . . to know the sex of a man" (Will, p.49). The poet states that we "suffer" because Alphaville does not provide us with this example of a truly physical and emotional love. Instead, like language, Alphaville reinforces a cerebral response which is, for Rich, essentially sterile.

Since language and film have failed, in Rich's estimation, to capture the emotional and physical experience that are the human sources of nature, the poet determines to define her own aesthetics.

She will, she claims in the last section of the poem, "[dream] the film-maker's dream but differently / free in the dark as if asleep" (*Will*, p.49): she will try to capture the fluidity, the immediacy of human perception as the film-maker does; but she will penetrate beyond the cerebral experience of art by "freeing" her conscious mind in a near-sleeping state. The "interior monologue of the poet" will, it seems, rely on material from the unconscious. The result will be the expression of Rich's newly-conceived definition of nature, "the moment of change" (*Will*, p.49).

What Rich seems to be indicating by this term is a spontaneous source of life in every person, a present-centred source of energy in which the experience of love, for instance, exists in a natural state, one in which the senses and the emotions are involved. This vital "moment of change", capable, as "change" suggests, of constant transformation, is a way of knowing, of experiencing with which our culturally-imposed consciousness has lost touch.

Clearly the poet-persona must depict this "moment of change" with, as she says, "the mind collecting, devouring" (*Will*, p.49); but when Rich declares that "the notes for the poem are the only poem" (*Will*, p.49), it seems that she is denying the mind its association with sterile cerebral activity. Instead, she suggests that only the fragments of experience before they have been too highly ordered or abstracted can express this germ of life.

There is little evidence of an awareness of the body or of the emotions in this final section. Instead, it seems that Rich is more concerned with defining the aesthetic process itself, by which she hopes to tap a more natural human source. The key concept in this creative act is defined in the last line of the poem: "The moment of change is the only poem" (Will, p.49). Such an aesthetics will require that the poet move beyond conventional structures of meaning and beyond the usual usages of language in order to realize her goal, a vital human source that can restore the life-affirming aspects of nature to human activity.

In "Valediction Forbidding Mourning" (1970) in The Will To Change, Rich attempts to depict "the moment of change" which she has advocated in "Images for Godard." In striving to portray nature as this entirely "inner" experience, Rich presents a scene which embodies the complex human response to separation and loneliness. Rich's poem, as a reply to Donne's famous poem, in which one person takes leave of another, suggests that Donne tried to repress nature by relying on conventional aesthetic and cultural artifice. Rich's version rejects such an aesthetics, and exposes instead the poet-persona's spontaneous unrestrained suffering.

In Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", thought takes precedence over emotion as the poet develops the elaborate conceit of the compass, which symbolizes a love "so much refined", so "inter-assured of the mind." This love, so pure, so spiritual, exists only in thought: "care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss."[20] Though it has a physical aspect, throughout the poem the physical manifestations of love -- those of "sublunary lovers" -- are secondary -- even inferior -- to the spiritual aspects of love. Therefore Donne advises his loved one to "make no noise", to not "profane" their love with a physical expression of sorrow at his departure.[21]

Rich does, however, respond in her version of "Valediction" with her physical afflictions: "My swirling wants. Your frozen lips."[22] She rejects the false comfort Donne strives for with words; instead, Rich concentrates on the hollowness of words, on their failure, in any conceit or configuration -- including her own -- to alleviate "the pain" of human isolation. Further, Rich intimates that words, abstract and meaningless, actually heighten her pain:

> The grammar turned and attacked me.
> Themes written under duress.
> Emptiness of the notations. (Will, p.50)

The italicized "my bleeding is under control", the stacatto effect of "swirling wants", "frozen lips" convey the pain that underlies the rules of grammar, the structures of culture. "The poster in the bus that said: / my bleeding is under control", like "the red plant in the cemetery of wreaths", suggests the repression of the human and the natural by language, and by all cultural abstraction (Will, p.50).

Rich counters this isolation and meaninglessness in her attempt to depict "the moment of change", the poet's total response to a departure. Her expression of emotional and physical suffering leads her, it seems, further and further from the conventional use of language. She rejects metaphors because, presumably, they are an example of the distancing effects of language; the poet declares that her images will remain "unglossed." "Hair, glacier, flashlight" (Will, p.50) are the words she then utilizes; these images, both concrete and obscure, are the poet's attempt to "do something very common in [her] own way" (Will, p.50).

Rich's obscurity in this poem, however deliberate, raises an unacknowledged problem. Though the poem may be her "natural" or actual reaction to a parting, as opposed to Donne's artificial response, its rejection of conventional methods of communication makes it almost incomprehensible. Not only are "hair, glacier, flashlight" difficult to interpret, the "landscape" described as a "time" (Will, p.50), again confusing, is also a metaphor, though the poet claimed she would not use this device. Whether she feels her metaphor is more or less meaningful than the "unglossed" images, or whether it is intended to express, like them, a deliberate subversion of meaning, what becomes clear is that meaning is essential, and that the rules of language are necessary tools. She concludes the poem:

> When I talk of taking a trip I mean forever.
> I could say: those mountains have a meaning
> but further than that I could not say.
>
> To do something very common, in my own way. (Will, p.50)

Unlike Donne, the poet does not promise a return; but if this is a farewell to the structures of language, it is questionable what the poet will henceforth communicate. Her remark about the mountains, which are, it seems, concrete but devoid of personal meaning, only emphasizes this.

It seems, then, that in trying to define nature as an increasingly inner human source, Rich has tapped an experience so insular that it cannot be communicated.

By the conclusion of Rich's exploration in Leaflets and The Will to Change, nature has evolved through a number of meanings: it was depicted in terms of animal vitality in "5:30 a.am." and "Abnegation"; then it was portrayed in "Planetarium" as it is manifested in female intuition; in "Tear Gas", nature was embodied in emotion, and finally it was described in "Images" and "Valediction" as an even deeper source of energy called "the moment of change." The question to be asked is: how have these poetic definitions enriched our understanding of nature?

"5:30 a.m." (Leaflets) successfully conveys the "body" consciousness of the woman in the poem and links her experience to the spontaneous instinctive awareness of a fox. The rhythms of breathing which seem to be the basis for the poem's structure, as well as the "trails of blood" and "miracle escapes" that woman and fox each experience, are indicative of an existence in which the body predominates. However, the dangers of this way of life, the "onrushing / killer" (Leaflets, p.31) in the form of hunter or hospital procedure, makes the poet's affirmation of the body, her decision to throw away pills and confront life and death, an unconvincing decision, particularly as the poem ends with the approach of the killer.

In "Abnegation" (Leaflets), the sequel poem, as we move away from the sensations of the body to the straightforward progressions of thought that suggest the mind of the poet-persona, the meaning of nature becomes a more familiar one. The woman in the poem, "instinct mortified" (Leaflets, p.38) by her participation in this male culture, yearns for the fox's living-in-the-moment. The contrasts between the fox, "every hair on her pelt alive" (Leaflets, p.38), springing toward her den, and the poet-persona's own rather resigned journey down a man-made road to a man-made house, part of a historical and literary tradition, may illustrate that our culture is a sterile act of will and an act of self-consciousness; but these polarities merely set up a rather obvious stereotypical comparison between animal and human existence. Further, the woman's dissatisfaction with culture cannot be resolved, because there is no way the woman "could be" an animal whatever her identification with the fox may be.

In "Planetarium" (Will), the poet has begun to explore other means of defining and validating nature. Caroline Herschel, depicted strikingly as a witch influenced by the pulse of the body and the rays of the moon, is nevertheless capable of culturally-accepted and valued insights. The portrait of Herschel, then, seems an apt choice to illustrate the link between woman and nature, and between nature and culture.

In "Tear Gas" (Poems), the witch is transformed into the actual woman who must confront patriarchy. As the definition of nature now evolves from Rich's imaginative re-conceiving of the forces that motivated Herschel to the more realistic depiction of the value of the emotions, nature becomes something both accessible and powerful. The parallel that Rich draws between the demonstrators at Fort Dix and the anti-patriarchal woman successfully illustrates that emotion is crucial to both personal and political realms. The image of the tear, the response of both woman and demonstrators, is an effective embodiment of the connection between "the politics of the body" and the "old ideas" (Poems, p.141) that comprise conventional thinking; when emotion is expressed, both body and mind are capable of dramatic change, as the final image of the woman transformed into a bird powerfully suggests.

"Images for Godard" (Will) seems to be a turning point in Rich's definition of nature. She has moved from the image of the fox, to the witch, to the bird, and perhaps feeling in this subsequent poem that she can only accomplish so much within the "male stockade" of language, she begins to search for a vehicle of expression that can break free of language's confining structures. In utilizing the techniques of film the poet concludes that both film and language have provided us with ideas estranged from actual experience. Rich's decision to try to get beneath ideas, even ideas about physicality or emotion, leads her to the new concept of nature as "the moment of change" (Will, p.49). This concept envisages a foundation of human response which begins in the body; it is a spontaneous in-the-moment complex of experience in which all aspects of one's being -- senses, emotion, thought -- are fused. But as Rich tries to capture this very deep personal source, she moves progressively away from the body and more and more into the realm of thought. Her concept of "the moment of change" as an "interior monologue", as "the notes for the poem" (Will, p.49), while it is intended to be a prescription for tapping a natural human source, is, nevertheless, a highly abstract vision. These words have lost the experiential associations that the earlier poems relied on, and are, rather, ideas about aesthetics. The loss of body consciousness, the loss of emotion that begins to emerge in the aesthetic concerns of "Images", culminates in the last poem in the sequence, "Valediction" (Will). Here it seems that Rich hopes to take the poetic manifesto of "Images" and apply it: that is, she attempts to be all nature, to be at that moment of change within herself. She rejects the conventions of language because they fail to locate or interpret the body. She uses concrete images with no apparent contextual significance to express her unique natural response. But "hair", "glacier" and "flashlight" (Will, p.50), now separated from the usual referents of communication, are virtually without significance. If these words are contrasted with the earlier sequence of images in "5:30

a.m." or the emotional torrent of words in "Tear Gas", it becomes clear that Rich's denial of the structures of language does not achieve a body consciousness, but rather draws the reader into a mental exercise, if s/he is to make any sense of Rich's choice of words. Thus, what we finally realize is that "nature" was more comprehensible when presented within the conventional uses of language. Rich's final experiment, in separating culture and nature so totally, has resulted in a poem in which the natural is so subjectively defined that it is impossible to apprehend.

It seems that Rich's exploration of nature has led to the realization that either nature is filtered through and possibly distorted by culture, or it is entirely separate and beyond articulation. Perhaps this is why Rich in Diving Into The Wreck leaves pure nature behind; instead she begins to explore the mind itself in its role as the source of interpretations of both nature and culture.

Chapter II: Towards a Bisexual Unconscious

In Rich's initial exploration of "thinking through the body", in which, as I illustrated in chapter one, she tried to re-evaluate the significance of "nature", the poet reached an aesthetic impasse because this pure source of origin seems to be incompatible with the processes of the mind. Therefore, in the next phase of her work, comprising the first section of Diving Into The Wreck[1] (1971-72), Rich moves from a consideration of "nature" to an enquiry into the mind itself as the source of all perceptions, both natural and cultural. Rich turns to the mind, still seeking images that will express what she calls a "corporeal intelligence"; she is seeking words that, as Chantal Chawaf puts it, "regenerate us, warm us, give birth to us . . . lead us to act and not to flee."[2] In this group of poems, Rich attempts to realize her feminist vision by exploring both conscious and unconscious dimensions of the mind. Her aesthetic goal throughout this process again seems to be similar to that of Chawaf:

> Language through writing has moved away from its original sources: the body and the earth . . . . Abstraction has starved language . . . words have a sensorial quality. Their role is to develop consciousness and knowledge by liberating our unconscious . . . .[3]

In this phase of her work, then, Rich begins by examining the conscious structures of the mind. The conventional male and female patterns of thought are exposed by the poet as shallow modes of perception, antithetical to the multi-levelled knowing that originates in the body. Rich goes on to investigate the concept of the unconscious, and explores the means of liberating what she believes to be its transformative powers. Rich's attempt to use the unconscious as a source of images that might express a "thinking through the body" is similar to Hélène Cixous' belief that in order to "write the body", the feminist writer must "include the domain of the unconscious . . . in order to revolutionize the dominant discourse to its very core."[4] Cixous believes that patriarchal ideology is based on the repression of the unconscious, especially the female's. This vision of the unconscious differs from the Freudian conception, which, Cixous declares, "tells you old stories." The female unconscious, she believes, is a more fundamental state; she names it "libido . . . which is not so easily controlled . . . This unspoken unconscious, free of cultural constraints, must inform the genuinely political text."[5]

In further consensus with Cixous, Rich sees the unconscious as both a source of inspiration and as a necessary creation. She believes the unconscious exerts a palpable influence to be "tapped" in the writing of poetry.[6] Rich also acknowledges that the primacy of thought, of language, ultimately entails relying on the perceptions of consciousness in order to interpret the preverbal unconscious processes.[7] She is, therefore, deliberately constructing an unconscious as she draws on its resources; this paradoxical feat, involving the reconciling of the idea of an autonomous self with that of a prescriptive network of language, is accomplished by Rich in two ways. Firstly, like Cixous, she is concerned with a separate, more essential "female" unconscious; as Cixous has described, such a conception of the unconscious allows for the possibility of moving beyond the restrictions of language to establish a radical vision of self. Secondly, and central to the exploration of consciousness and the unconscious in this phase of Rich's work, is her belief that, in moving into the purer sources of the female unconscious, the core of self that may be discovered, the actual foundation of the unconscious that will be revealed, is bisexual. In an interview with Barbara and Albert Gelpi in 1972, Rich has stated, "a poetry which could affirm a bisexual vision, or which could affirm a whole other way of being male and female as part of its consciousness, as part of its tradition, such a poetry would . . . it seems to me, be churning up new unconscious material, which we would be fascinated and influenced by."[8] The bisexual unconscious, uncovered as the feminist poet delves into her own female unconscious, might, then, in expanding our knowledge of self, inspire images which could express a thinking informed by the body, and transform our present conceptions of language and consciousness.

The androgynous or bisexual person, according to the liberal feminist definition, possesses the physical characteristics of one or the other sex, but manifests a combination of male and female behavioural traits, as they are presently in existence. The liberal feminist believes that a psychological evolution towards androgyny could be achieved by offering the same educational opportunities to both men and women, with no attempt to enforce stereotypical, gender-based behavioural traits. The eradication of sexual differentiation would result, in the opinion of these feminists, in the liberation, psychologically and socially, of both sexes.[9]

Jane Vanderbosch has noted the function of the androgyne in this phase of Rich's work: the androgynous or bisexual person "signifies Rich's . . . attempt to integrate the male and the female into a holistic vision of the human . . . . The androgyne symbolizes the poet's belief that women are androgynous because they have had to learn the male in order to survive in the patriarchal world and to retain the female in order to exist as women." [10] Vanderbosch omits to mention that in the poems of Diving Into the Wreck, in which Rich affirms bisexuality, she moves beyond the liberal feminist definition, and is, it seems, in agreement with Hélène Cixous, who sees bisexuality as "the original condition of every individual . . .which is subsequently displaced and transformed by culture." [11]

However, Rich's and Cixous' conceptions of bisexuality diverge significantly. Rich seems to agree with Cixous that bisexuality is neither heterosexual nor homosexual; but Cixous' claim that bisexuality is a state of dynamic exchange between people, "a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations" [12], is not evident in Rich's poetic vision. Though Rich's definition of "thinking through the body" involves a more holistic way of thinking and acting which is energized by the body, her attempt to express this process in the poetic depiction of bisexuality does not evoke the unending possibilities for human interaction that Cixous envisions. Instead, Rich's exploration culminates with the portrait of the individual bisexual unconscious.

The poet's hypothesis that the unconscious is bisexual, is, it seems, related to her earlier interest in nature in Leaflets and The Will to Change. In this earlier poetry, examined in the previous chapter, Rich's exploration of nature culminated in the advocacy of "the moment of change". According to Rich, this inner original source of energy exists separately from culturally-conditioned thought, and is our most basic experience of self, in which senses, emotion and thought are fused. This total "self" awareness underlying our social or culturally-imposed consciousness, will, Rich states in "Images", be tapped by the poet in a near-sleeping state.[13] This suggests that Rich herself sees the connection between this moment of change, this pure source of energy, and the unconscious. The link with bisexuality follows, since, as I mentioned earlier, the poet at this time conceives of androgyny as our "natural" state, one that has been blocked by patriarchal conditioning.

As Rich begins in this phase of her work to experiment with the idea of a bisexual psyche, she must first prepare the reader for the journey from conscious to unconscious realms. In the early poems of this group, the poet considers, then rejects the present patriarchal bias in consciousness, the bias towards rationality and objectivity. She then depicts the consciousness or mode of thinking that she associates with the female stereotype, the woman as nurturer, as well as the alternative feminist way of thinking, in which woman struggles to separate her self from patriarchal definitions. Both of these female states of consciousness seem to be inadequate because they do not embody the dynamic process which, as stated in the introduction, she believes "thinking" to be. In her concern for complete transformation of what we like to describe as "thought", Rich looks ahead to Mary Daly who, in Gyn-Ecology (1976), describes our conventional ways of knowing as "robotitude".[14] This "maintenance level" of thought is merely ritualized behaviour, and Daly cites de Beauvoir to reinforce her own vision: "Life is occupied in both perpetuating itself and in surpassing itself; if all it does is maintain itself, then living is only not dying." [15]

This constant state of routine "maintenance" thinking must be replaced, Daly claims, by "be-ing", which results from "breaking the casts" of patriarchal thought, and releasing the latent transformative potential of the authentic female self.[16] In seeking, like Daly, new ways of thinking and being, Rich rejects stereotypical ways of knowing not only because she believes them to be repressive patterns that deny active participation in life; Rich also believes that the male way of thinking, like the nurturing female and radical feminist consciousness, has denied or lost touch with its relation to the body. In casting aside these conditioned thought processes, the poet provides the motivation for "diving" beneath their surfaces into the depths of her own subjective sources; here she hopes to find a revolutionary alternative to present conceptions of thought, an alternative that will re-vitalize "knowing" by emphasizing the value of our senses and our emotions. Since Rich, like Daly and Cixous, sees the female, in her opposition to patriarchal values, in her "difference", as the potent source of this more total human awareness, in the later stages of this phase the poet enters the female psyche; here her vision begins to change. She leaves the material world behind, along with rational thought processes. The poetic form becomes more fluid, linking surreal images in complex patterns of association. The increasingly sonorous voice likewise contributes to the sense that the poetic vision has shifted from waking to dreaming consciousness. The dream voyage culminates in the title poem in which the poet "discovers" the bisexual self, the being that she hopes will provide a starting point for insights into "thinking through the body." This exploration is not without obstacles, however. As we will see, one of the difficulties that Rich must contend with is the problem of emerging from the unconscious and presenting androgyny as a tangible possibility for conscious life.

In Trying To Talk With A Man (1971), Rich uses a female persona to explicate the conflicts between male and female consciousness. In this poem, man and woman, symbolizing respectively objectivity and subjectivity, thought and feeling, are on a desert where the lives of both are in danger. It is the male consciousness that Rich, speaking through the woman in the poem, finally rejects. This masculine way of thinking is responsible, she implies, for the desolate state of nature and the sterile modes of human interaction depicted in the poem.

The desert at high noon, steeped in silence, with "deformed cliffs" is the place where man and woman are "testing bombs" which are, the persona states, experiments with themselves. This stark "ghost town" is all that remains of an earlier life, a life that we are told was "given up" in order to "change the face of" the natural world, and make, as the bombs suggest, scientific "progress" (Diving, p.3). The past existence, in contrast with the present "condemned scenery", was one in which all the senses played a part:

> whole L.P. collections
>   bakery windows
> full of dry, chocolate-filled Jewish cookies,
> the language of love-letters, of suicide notes,
> afternoons on the riverbank (Diving, p.3)

If the couple who have lost this richer life are to survive the desert and escape the destruction of humankind, the poet-persona suggests that they must achieve "an acute angle of understanding" (Diving, p.3). Compared to an "underground river" penetrating the desert, this life-giving understanding is not based on isolated thought -- it is described as something the woman can "feel" (Diving, p.3). The drive of the river, "forcing its way between deformed cliffs" (Diving, p.3), embodies the energy required to revive the environment and re-vitalize the existence of man and woman. However, the communication and salvation linked with feeling that the woman envisions, is a futile hope, because between herself and the man there exists a "silence"; they are unable to take constructive action because the man sees the woman as an "emergency." For this reason the woman declares,

> Out here I feel more helpless
> with you than without you (Diving, p.3)

The male's way of dealing with the emergency is the antithesis of the woman's "feeling-knowing." His seeming objectivity, his rational consciousness, that which allows him to talk "of the danger / as if it were not [themselves] / as if [they] were testing anything else" denies the need for emotion (Diving, p.4). Further, the man, unlike the woman, has no connection with the life-sustaining aspects of nature. His "dry heat", suggestive of the annihilating heat of the desert, and his eyes, sinister stars that "reflect lights that spell out: EXIT" (Diving, p.4), are symbols of an unnatural destructive force. The male's irrational adherence to isolated thought has, then, alienated him from the natural world and his fellow beings; this mode of consciousness will be responsible, Rich declares, for the "exit" of the human race. The poem then ends on a negative note; having rejected the male way of thinking, Rich neglects to elucidate how the strengths of the emotive female consciousness might provide the insights for physical and spiritual survival.

In "When We Dead Awaken" (1971), the poet does turn her attention to the female mind and attempts to describe a feminist consciousness: that is, the mind of the anti-patriarchal woman. However, as the woman in this poem struggles to define herself, we see that her rejection of male thought is not a solution in itself, for she must now decipher and express her own vision, her authentic female consciousness. Ironically what this woman finds is that her perceptions have been tainted by her participation, however unwilling, in contemporary culture.

Whereas in "Trying To Talk" the male mind was a desert of rationality, the female consciousness in this poem is about as static; it is described as a tapestry into which are woven the "afflictions" of patriarchy. The female awareness of the network of cultural catastrophes has, in a sense, resulted in a kind of mental and emotional paralysis; it is not the vital "thinking through the body" that Rich has posited as an elixir for contemporary consciousness.

In the first section of the poem, as Rich describes cultural data "outside our skins", then the female persona's inner "scars of . . . decisions", and finally her will to change expressed in the urge to "remake" civilization, the poet illustrates that the "stains" of patriarchy have permeated the fabric of the mind on many levels.[18] Not only the "social" consciousness, but what we like to think of as our more individual, "natural" self has been affected. Thus the contamination of the "guerrillas . . . advancing", "the trash . . . in the dump" (Diving, p.5) has penetrated even the supposedly pristine female psyche, the "self" that is theoretically "closer to nature." Even the feminist, retaliating against the current female stereotypes, "working to pick apart / working . . . to remake/. . . this cloth of darkness, / this woman's garment" (Diving, p.5) is, Rich implies, a byproduct of the larger cultural forces. Her experience of herself, of the central importance of her emotions, of her physicality, are conditioned and infringed upon by her unavoidable participation in patriarchy.

Because of the all-pervasiveness of cultural contamination, Rich posits in the second section of the poem that "the fact of being separate" (Diving, p.5), the experience of the anti-patriarchal woman is, in fact, a rather sterile existence, that "enters [her] livelihood like . . . a chest of seventeenth-century wood", its lock "shaped like a woman's head" (Diving, pp.5-6). Not only is female identity at present an unknown because "the key" to interpreting the complexity of female experience has not been found; also this "non-existence" seems to be the antithesis of "body consciousness" -- the chest is "wooden", from the "North", inscrutable; even its compartments and panels do not suggest the energized potential that one might assume to be part of the feminist perspective.

What is possible in terms of authentic feminist activity is bringing "things of your own" (Diving, p.6) to this chest. This process begins in keeping a diary, and then develops, as the final section of the poem indicates, into the strength to admit that what is culturally "true" might not tally with one's own experience. The poet-persona cites the failures of the society around her, knowing that these atrocities are "causes for hesitation" (Diving, p.6); but the realization that culture is the "disproof of what we thought possible" (Diving, p.6) is, in itself, a liberating perspective, for the refusal to accept the rape of the land, the "failures of medication", the "words . . . thick with unmeaning", is, the poet declares, bringing one "closer to the truth / of the lies we were living" (Diving, p.6).

The last lines of the poem depict the potential for new life that may result from the negation of patriarchy: "a weed / flowering in tar, a blue energy piercing . . . a bedrock disbelief" (Diving, p.6) is the symbol of the possibilities for growth that may be released; this image also suggests the kind of intense effort that will be required if the authentic consciousness, buried under layers of patriarchal thought, is, like the weed, to break through.

Perhaps because patriarchal influences seem to be so intrinsic to both male and feminist consciousness, the poet now abandons the concept of a pure source of "self." Instead of rejecting a socially-defined identity as she did in the previous poem, Rich now experiments with mirror images of the conventional female self, using the culturally-accepted image of femininity as the basis of her exploration of a new, more physical and emotional way of knowing. In "The Mirror In Which Two Are Seen As One" (1971), different aspects of the female consciousness are presented in a dialogue in which the "you" addressed and the "sister" depicted are mirrored back and forth to suggest that the reflection of change may lie dormant in our present seemingly inescapable modes of perception. As the images accumulate, Rich illustrates how the body, so intrinsic to the female sense of self, has been used against the woman, rather than to promote wholeness of being. The poet tries to conceive of a way that woman's physicality might be re-instated to radically alter the present stereotype.

The domestic activities of the woman in the first section of the poem are, then, presented as they have been culturally defined, and as they deny the needs of the actual woman. Her culinary efficiency, her assured "talking of love"[19] initially seem to be the model of energy and confidence. However, these images are then inverted, and the sense of activity and productivity they suggest is reversed to illustrate that the conventional domestic woman's life is actually counter-productive and self-denying: "love-apples cramp [her] sideways / with sudden emptiness" (Diving, p.14). Her hands, no longer efficient, are "raw with scraping . . . juice runs down [her] cheekbones / like sweat or tears" (Diving, p.14). As these images flow from one line to the next, illustrating that the nurturing female and the self-destructive female are actually reflections of the same consciousness, they convey the nightmarish entrapment of the conventional female who is all "glamor" on the surface, but inside, "bleeding / [her] heart out" (Diving, p.14). The forward movement of the poem, created by the enjambment and active verbs, emphasizes that the damage to self proceeds as surely as do the cooking and cleaning activities that the stereotypical female appears to so readily embrace.

In section two of the poem, the self-negating aspects of this stereotype of the life-giving female are expanded further as Rich depicts friendship between two women. As Susan Van Dyne has observed, "the exchange between the two women satisfies a greater range of desires than those implied in section one."[20] The "sister", or aspect of the female self defined, inspires intense response:

> you blaze like lightening about the room
> flicker around her like fire
> dazzle yourself in her wide eyes (Diving, p.15)

The vision of woman is one that suggests physical energy as well as emotional vitality. The "listing [of] her unfelt needs / thrusting the tenets of your life / into her hands" (Diving, p.15) suggests the total exchange and communication between the two women. However, the fact that "words fail . . . in the stare of her hunger" (Diving, p.15) indicates that this surface impression is again a superficial one; the multi-faceted vision of all-sustaining love is more an idea than the truth of female experience. The tears of the women are not "positive" as suggested by Van Dyne[21]; in fact, Rich's response, "dry up your tears / we are sisters" (Diving, p.15) is more likely to be ironic. For in spite of the rush of images of love in this section, the poet insightfully suggests the needs of body and mind which go unmet even in this seemingly fulfilling relationship. The poet suggests that, at some very basic level, there is an astonishing "hunger", one both physical and spiritual; yet the flood of the gestures of love continues:

> you hand her another book
> scored by your pencil
> you hand her a record
> of two flutes in India reciting (Diving, p.15)

The poem does not illustrate that these attempts at comfort are effective or ineffective, but since literature and music, like language, are part of the conditioned perceptions and responses which have shaped and confined this false female consciousness, it seems likely that they will fail to satisfy the deeply-felt unmet needs.

In section three, the nun, the nurse, the woman dying in childbirth, the women who died at birth continue to reflect the wasted energy and horrifying restrictions imposed on women's lives. Rich suggests that, in their acceptance of culturally-defined behaviour, women are themselves responsible for their spiritual death. The multiple images of birth are like the mirroring of the fragmented female consciousness; they are also the evocation of meaningless repetition, the words reflecting and intensifying their own limitations and sterility.

However, the self-abnegation that "your mother dying in childbirth over and over" (Diving, p.16) embodies is in contrast with the poem's final image of hope. The woman gives birth to herself:

> [her] two hands grasping [her] head
> drawing it down against the blade of life
> [her] nerves the nerves of a midwife
> learning her trade (Diving, p.16)

The mirror reflects not the self-sacrificing nurturer but the new self-directed woman. "Learning her trade", the last line, stresses the awareness that will be required to move beyond the ritualized behaviour of the female stereotype to a new definition of self. "Grasping" and "drawing" embody the effort and awareness that was lacking in the first portrait of the woman who scaled, talked, burnished, "no motion wasted" (Diving, p.14); further, the verbs associated with giving birth suggest the concentration and determination that is lacking in the earlier depiction of "your mother dying in childbirth over and over."

Rich has, then, extended the possibilities of female consciousness in transforming woman's biology. Now, as woman gives birth to herself, her body is the source of powerful energy and the key to her own fulfillment. However, the question still remains: how does the woman give birth to her new consciousness? What does she become as she leaves behind the prescribed female role?

In "Waking In The Dark" (1971), a five-part poem that explores the nature of the dream world, Rich suggests that the vital material of the unconscious might free woman from the stasis of stereotypical concepts of femininity, allowing her to truly give birth to a more authentic self.

Throughout this poem Rich clearly distinguishes between what she considers to be a cultural and a natural dream state. The former is a "dream" in which body and mind are controlled by culture. The latter, where conscious structures are truly relinquished, is the source of a vision of female power which does not involve control. It is to this fertile unconscious that woman must surrender herself.

In section one of the poem, Rich captures the slowing-down of perceptions that precedes sleep. She ponders in this half-waking, half-sleeping state the problems of human control and lack of control in the actual world. Rich states, "we are composed of molecules . . . arranged without our knowledge and consent."[22] She then compares our lack of biological control with the subversive controls of the media: the wirephoto of the man from Bangladesh is "his presence for the world." "Knowing nothing about it", this man becomes a symbol of third world starvation (Diving, p.7). Rich also implies that those who look at this photo on the front page of the newspaper "know nothing about it." The media shapes this man's identity just as it predetermines our response to him. The poet, then, suggests that body and mind, our sense of self and our sense of another are at present beyond our personal control. Further, without control over these aspects of our lives, we are as lacking in self-determination as a "figure in the paving stones" (Diving, p.7).

In section two, these pre-sleep perceptions begin to dissolve and re-form as Rich depicts the closely-textured dream world. However, even in the poet-persona's dream it seems that cultural images have penetrated. Here, as in the conscious world, people are estranged from body and mind, and from each other. Though a nightmare of societal fragmentation is depicted, Rich's recounting of her dream indicates that the dream personages accept the destructive forces about them; they actually weep for "The Man Without A Country" (Diving, p.7), a fictional character who wishes never to see America again; yet there seems to be more reason to envy than to pity him, for confusion and chaos have overtaken the city:

> We were standing in line outside of something
> two by two, or alone in pairs, or simply alone,
> looking into windows full of scissors,
> windows full of shoes. The street was closing,
> the city was closing, would we be the lucky ones
> to make it? (Diving, p.7)

The repeated visions of blood, the repetition of "you" suggest mounting terror:

> They are dumping animal blood into the sea
> to bring up the sharks.
>
> You worship the blood
> you call it hysterical bleeding
> you want to drink it like milk
> you dip your finger into it and write
> you faint at the smell of it
> you dream of dumping me into the sea . (Diving, pp.7-8)

Rich's response to these horrifying acts, desires and dreams suggests both physical and mental suffering:

> Sometimes every
> aperture of my body
> leaks blood. I don't know whether
> to pretend that this is natural. (Diving, p.7)

She asks, "Is there a law about this, a law of nature?" (Diving, p.8), as she wonders about her own suffering, and about the "they" and "you" who are obsessed with blood. Though she wonders if male fear and hatred of women is "a law of nature", like menstrual bleeding, or an "instinct", like the shark's attraction to blood, she concludes that the male "dream" of dumping her into the sea, like her own dream of sorrow for "The Man Without A Country", are not natural, but further instances of cultural contamination which has penetrated both conscious and dream worlds. As Rich links male hatred of women, "the tragedy of sex" (Diving, p.8), to the destruction of the natural world, it is clear that at the root of patriarchal afflictions she perceives the denial of the sources of life -- both nature and womanhood. This culture of war and death is "a man's world" (Diving, p.8); and men are, Rich states, so estranged from life sources that they have "sold [their world] to the machines" (Diving, p.8).

As Rich walks the "unconscious forest" she realizes, "nothing will save this" (Diving, p.8). Patriarchal definitions of male and female, patriarchal consciousness, even the cultural interpretations of the unconscious are, she implies, "unnatural" conceptions of humanity. These accepted beliefs maintain a dangerous, if precarious, "control."

Yet there is a vital source, tapped through relinquishing control, that Rich creates as a solution to the pressure that culture exerts over consciousness and unconscious. This is a female source;

here, in the female unconscious -- that which men have failed to explore -- is the possibility for the reassertion of natural experience. It seems that Rich sees the female unconscious, free of conditioned responses, more natural than cultural, as the true unconscious, a realm as yet untapped and undefined. Here, in sinking into a seeming powerlessness, new human resources -- for both men and women -- can be envisioned.

In the fourth section of "Waking", Rich uses Leni Rienfenstahl's film, Olympia, to depict the poetic process of tapping the deeper unconscious sources beyond societal controls. The first step, Rich suggests, is the conscious examination and rejection of the structures of culture. Hence Rienfenstahl's film, created as Nazi propaganda, embodies the cultural oppression that Rich is rejecting. It is interesting that the film depicts "bodies riding the air" (Diving, p.9); yet these bodies are not free; they are, in fact, constrained by the film-maker, who manipulates them to express a fascistic vision. Rich then symbolically re-winds this film:

> The bodies rising
> arching back to the tower
> time reeling backward (Diving, p.9)

The poet tries to conceive of the film as it could have existed before Nazism, before patriarchy. In this version of Rienfenstahl's film, the imagination, drawing on the female unconscious, is free of all restraints. The diving bodies likewise have more freedom, more power:

> The bodies falling again
> freely
>   faster than light
> the water opening
> like air
> like realization (Diving, p.9)

This creativity is not only used to transform the significance of the body; in the poem's final section, creativity is expressed through the body, through physical love, to re-vision an entire way of life. Unlike the earlier male "dream" of violence in which the natural world is denied, the female dream of love is one in which self and other are united and are associated with the natural world as they "[stream] through the slow / citylight forest ocean" (Diving, p.10). Female love transforms even the urban environment:

> the traffic flows off from us
> pouring back like a sheet
> the asphalt stirs with tenderness
> there is no dismay (Diving, p.10)

The city is no longer described in terms of war, line-ups and rations; recreated now by the female unconscious, it is an environment which expresses openness instead of restriction, peace instead of violence. Further, the sense of motion created as one image merges with another, the sense of energy expressed by verbs such as "flow", "pouring", "streams", "stirs", indicate that in the female unconscious there is freedom from the constricting structures of patriarchy, so oppressively depicted in the earlier poems.

However, as the poet concludes the poem, she is forced to admit:

> This is the saying of a dream
> on waking
> I wish there were somewhere
> actual we could stand (Diving, p.10)

In the real world she must still confront "the wildwood / where the split began" (Diving, p.10). In this world female love is not enough to heal patriarchal dualities. Reconciling the split between male/female, culture/nature, thought/feeling will, she implies, require a re-visioning of that most basic assumption of contemporary culture: that man and woman are two separate creations.

"Diving Into The Wreck" (1972) is Rich's attempt to conceive of a union of male and female characteristics as they may exist in a natural state in the unconscious. The poet now expands her vision of the female sensibility, powerful in its separation from patriarchy. She dives deeper to the very sources of this female self where she finds an androgynous "core", a union of male and female in the psyche.

In order to provide a unique mythos for this newly-created self, Rich taps the patterns of the traditional quest but re-examines their content.[23] The poet's exploration, depicted as an underwater journey to the site of "the wreck", in fact encapsulates much of her own feminist quest to define the possibilities of conscious and unconscious life. However, as we shall see, the androgynous psyche, rather than exemplifying a reinvigorated consciousness, a response to life that transcends the sterility of patriarchy, exemplifies instead the limitations that language and consciousness impose on our natural impulses.

Throughout "Diving" Rich tries to distinguish between the words and ideas of culture, and a material, physical aspect of life that is not expressed by abstraction, that is not in the books. Rich begins by contrasting herself, the heroine-explorer, with the stereotypical hero of patriarchy, who is both archetypal man and cliché media figure. Using the banal language of the media, Rich disclaims any similarity between herself and "Cousteau with his / assiduous team . . . [and] sun-flooded schooner."[24] While he remains a part of the cultural conventions, Rich dives beneath these mere surfaces into the sea of her own unconscious; here, she believes, she will discover "the thing itself" . . . an original self . . . "and not the myth" (Diving, p.23). She is entirely alone in her exploration, for she has left behind conditioned perceptions of the outer world, and conventional definitions of the unconscious itself. For this reason, in spite of "the book of myths", "camera" and "knife" she carries as aids in her exploration, "there is no one / to tell [her] when the ocean / will begin" (Diving, p.23). She must herself try to distinguish between cultural conditioning and original self.

The descent into the unconscious is a gradual process:

> Rung after rung and still
> The oxygen immerses [her]   (Diving, p.22)

The tools of the actual world are relied on initially, but soon the rubber suit, the mask, the ladder are seen as ridiculous encumbrances that must be discarded. The explorer dives deeper through the blue light, clear atoms. She crawls like an insect, her flippers now crippling her. Finally " [she is] blacking out" . . . she has entered the unconscious, where action is "not a question of power" (Diving, p.23). Action is, however, directly related to body-knowledge -- without the preconceptions and paraphernalia of the outer world, she must "learn alone / to turn [her] body without force" (Diving, p.23); she practises the loss of conscious control, the surrender to the forces of the unconscious. She claims it would be easy to forget what she came for in this timeless zone, but she must remember that she "came to explore the wreck" (Diving, p.23). The wreck, "the thing itself . . . not the story of the wreck", is "more permanent / than fish or weed" (Diving, p.23); it is, it seems, a natural foundation upon which culture has imposed its abstract conceptions of identity.

As in the traditional quest, the "treasure" that Rich, the heroine-explorer, is meant to find will transform her life. However, Rich's reward is not an object extraneous to her; it is, rather, the self at its core, bearing "evidence of damage", "the ribs of disaster" (Diving, p.24). Rich could be suggesting here that the deepest human resources have been deformed through neglect. She has, however, at least identified this long-lost source which still possesses a "beauty" now "threadbare." The result for the explorer is an integration of the fragments of consciousness. The diver perhaps symbolizes Rich's belief that the depths of the unconscious form a fluid, many-levelled source of energy, for the explorer has now become "diver", "fouled compass" and the wreck itself (Diving, p.24). She is the source of all visions -- and revisions -- of life. Her central realization is that she is both mermaid and merman, male and female: She declares "We are, I am, you are . . . the one who find our way / back to this scene" (Diving, p.24), as if to also suggest that this bisexual psyche is a collective phenomenon. The androgynous self is not recorded in "the book of myths" (Diving, p. 24), but it is given life through Rich's rediscovery process. This self, in the final stanza of the poem is, "by cowardice or courage", the "one" who has come back to this original scene,

> carrying a knife, a camera
> a book of myths
> in which
> our names do not appear. (Diving, p.24)

However, this androgynous and potentially integrated self at the site of the wreck does not capture the potential of the "natural" consciousness that Rich has described as "active, fluid, and expanding." Because this new-found self has been conceived in terms of cultural artefacts -- compass, barrels, logs, camera and knife -- it has unfortunately become anchored to this mundane equipment. Instead of transcending the ordinary world, this supposed radical self now seems a part of it, resembling the stereotypical skin-diver.

Perhaps this is why Rich leaves the androgynous self swimming about the wreck, still clutching the book that denies her/his existence -- she may be suggesting that she sees the conflict between mind and body, culture and nature as insolvable. She may be recognizing that the structures of language, and of consciousness, inhibit her envisioning of a point of origin that precedes rational control.

Rich's exploration of conscious and unconscious realms, begun, it seems, with the conviction that contemporary consciousness must be revitalized by re-establishing its relation to the body, has evolved from a depiction of patriarchal consciousness to a depiction of the androgynous unconscious. To gauge Rich's effectiveness in transforming our conceptions of the processes of the mind, it might be useful to reconsider the comments of Mary Daly, referred to in the introduction to this chapter. Daly's conviction that feminists must break out of the "casts" of patriarchal thought, and strive to generate "e-motion", the energy to "stray off the tracks of tradition that betray women and nature"[25], though it post-dates Rich's exploration in Diving Into The Wreck, is similar to Rich's aim to discover a female way of knowing that patriarchy has denied.

Rich's success as a poet will depend, then, on the extent to which her particular focus, to depict "thinking through the body", allows her to move beyond the usual patterns and images of contemporary thought.

The first poem in this phase of Rich's work, "Trying To Talk With A Man", sets up the irreconcilable conflict between male and female consciousness. Man, described in terms of his eyes which, like a neon sign, flash "EXIT", possesses a consciousness devoid of emotion, and alienated from nature. He is, it seems, responsible for the desolate state of the environment which man and woman inhabit. Woman, whose emotive capacities are compared to a river that could save the desert, is disregarded by the "rational" male. The result of this denial, the poet-persona states, can only be the extinction of the human race. However, the poet's images do not truly go beyond present conceptions; the male/female, thought/feeling dualities, while aptly portrayed in the poem, are nevertheless familiar stereotypes. And while the rationality and objectivity of the masculine consciousness are clearly repudiated, the poet does not attempt to explicate the strengths of the female consciousness, or to offer any potential union of male and female that might express a thinking augmented by the power of the emotions and the energy of the body.

In "When We Dead Awaken", the problem of moving beyond conventional categories of thought in order to define a feminist consciousness is explored. The two images initially utilized, the tapestry and the wooden chest, are apt in suggesting the difficulty of making contact with an authentic consciousness. The tapestry, into which is woven the "afflictions" of patriarchy, effectively embodies how inextricably culture and consciousness are bound. The image of the locked wooden chest suggests that, though there may be an authentic way of knowing and being that is separate from cultural contamination, it is not conceivable; just as the key to the wooden chest has been lost, so too the means of separating self and culture is irretrievably lost or beyond our present understanding. As Rich attempts to show a way that thinking might move out of the trap of cultural imperatives, she uses the image of a weed flowering in tar; this is the symbol of growth, made possible, she posits, as one begins to admit that the way of life imposed by culture is a lie. The problem with this resolution is that the image of the weed, while it does suggest hope, as well as a fierce vitality that could embody the reconnection of consciousness with the energy of the body, is a rather familiar emblem of rebirth (like a tree growing in Brooklyn); and coming as it does after the poem's list of patriarchal disasters, the weed is not convincing, but rather seems a futile wish, like a tremor within the rigid patriarchal mindset.

In "The Mirror In Which Two Are Seen As One", the actual breaking down of these rigid structures of consciousness is triggered as Rich begins to illustrate poetically the importance of woman's physicality. By using images to create a mirroring effect, Rich depicts the female stereotype, juxtaposing it simultaneously with a portrait of the self-destructive aspects of this nurturing role. Thus the mirror reflection of the efficient housewife is, for example, "hands . . . raw with scraping" (Diving, p.14), and the reflection of the all-giving female lover or friend is "the stare of. . . . hunger" (Diving, p.15), a spiritual and emotional hunger that cannot be satisfied as long as thinking and acting are based on convention and stereotyping, rather than actual human need. The poem presents one image after another, finally culminating in the disturbing portrait of woman dying in childbirth. However, the pattern is suddenly broken; the image of the woman giving birth to her self effectively makes the point that woman's physicality, the basis of her social role as nurturer, must be re-conceived as a tool for the development of her own being. Though this sudden mirroring of the woman mothering herself may seem unexpected and even unconvincing after the sense of entrapment that the earlier images suggest, it seems that Rich is experimenting with ways that rigid preconceptions can be transcended. The mirror device, like a hypnotic chant, or a process of free association, perhaps suggests the way that the mind can "know", on a preconscious level, what is beyond its grasp in everyday patterns of thought. This depiction, then, of the movement out of stereotypical thinking and beyond it to a way of being in which woman's physicality is used to re-vitalize and transform her consciousness, rather than impoverish it, makes this poem a turning point in Rich's exploration of the mind.

The movement away from everyday consciousness and the attempt to portray a healthy body-centred knowing are taken a step further in "Waking In The Dark" which depicts the energy that is created and expressed by physical love; the transformation of both self and culture that results is the poetic imagining of an experience in which the structures of patriarchal consciousness dissolve in the female unconscious. Scenes of motion and transformation predominate in this energized dream; the female self is movingly portrayed as a person who is a thinking-feeling body. Diving, touching, feeling, she "streams" through a city that "stirs with tenderness" (Diving, p.10). This fluid transformation seems to be the realization of Rich's goals as expressed in "Trying to Talk" and "When We Dead Awaken": she has re-vitalized the desert and created a powerful female sensibility.

However, her quest does not stop at this point, for "Waking In The Dark" is, as the poet declares at its conclusion, "the saying of a dream" (Diving, p.10). Since Rich believes that a life in which the body is as crucial as the mind is not only conceivable but has its potential within each of us, she goes on in "Diving" to try to describe a natural core of self which has been denied by culture, but is, nevertheless, intact. This foundation of both consciousness and the unconscious is bisexual; in acknowledging our bisexual source, Rich believes that patriarchal dualisms, grounded in male-female distinctions, will be eradicated, and that the untapped, unrealized energies of humankind will be set free.

This male and female being, however, who is supposedly beyond the conceptions of patriarchy, is not the radical image we might have anticipated. It does not, for one thing, seem convincing as an original source, for it is grounded in the commonplace images of underwater exploration. Even the more dream-like images of streaming hair and drowned staring face do not suggest the vital transformative powers of the unconscious as "Waking" does. Though the poet can depict the "dream", or potential of an integrated female self in "Waking", when she attempts in "Diving" to actualize this self, she is unsuccessful. The images associated with the androgynous psyche, the supposedly original state of the unconscious, fail to evoke associations of either radical energy or newly-conceived human potential, because "camera", "knife" and "book" (Diving, p.24) are too-familiar images of the everyday world.

Rosemary Tonks has also observed this problem in the poems of Diving Into The Wreck. In "Cutting The Marble" Tonks notes that "the inner world that [Rich] shows us is furnished . . .in much the same way as the outer world",[26] and therefore seems inauthentic. It is possible that Rich, obsessed in Tonks' view by "the burdens of the modern world" has come up against the extent to which "inner" is "outer". Tonks suggests that Rich's imagination is "exhausted";[27] but it is also possible that the poet's full-stop in this phase results from her own awareness of the impossibility of imagining clear-cut poetic alternatives to what currently exists. She cannot, in other words, escape the outer controls of culture, of consciousness, and surrender to the unconscious because she is a conscious being and a product of her culture.

It seems to be precisely this difficulty of distinguishing between outer and inner life, between consciousness and the unconscious, that results in Rich's growing interest in the next phase of her work in more pragmatic ways of expressing her conception of "thinking through the body". She chooses, in fact, to explore the possibilities for a feminist poetics, for a re-evaluation of the body's significance, as these possibilities are manifested in the "outer" world. Having rejected in this phase the current stereotypes of male and female consciousness, the poet now applies her feminist re-visioning where it can take on a more practical significance -- in the day-by-day activities of the female community.

Chapter III: Women in Community

The most obvious and crucial development that occurs in The Dream of a Common Language[1] (1974-77) and A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far[2] (1978-81) is Rich's rejection of the androgynous unconscious which she had advocated in Diving Into The Wreck, and her subsequent determination to explore the potential of women acting in the world, particularly as part of a separate female community. This development is linked to Rich's decision to sever contact with a male world she cannot understand or condone. "The man-who-would-understand / the lost brother, the twin" is, she now claims, an illusion; he is as much "male" as the patriarchal man, the "mutant", the "blood-compelled exemplar / of a 'botched civilization'"; he manifests, she declares, "a passivity we mistake / -- in the desperation of our search -- / for gentleness . . . ."[3] Speaking perhaps from her personal frustrations as a lesbian feminist, Rich now sees androgyny as a "useless term."[4]

Her conclusion mirrors the convictions of many radical feminists. Initially they had maintained that androgyny -- not as a biological fact, but as a social and psychological alternative -- would be a practical means of altering current social structures. This theory was soon rejected as both overly optimistic and impractical; the growing conviction of these feminists was, rather, that sex-related behaviour is too deeply ingrained to permit a yoking of male and female characteristics.[5]

Rich, in her earlier exploration of the mind, noted in Chapter Two, had attempted to depict bisexuality as a natural impulse rooted in the unconscious; her subsequent decision to move beyond androgyny results partly from her acknowledgement, like that of other radical feminists, of the practical difficulties of actually integrating male and female characteristics in our present culture. But as a poet, Rich also experienced problems in the creative expression of androgyny or bisexuality. Though she successfully portrayed the sterility of patriarchal thought and the transformative potential of the feminine dream world, she could not depict an even more elemental experience, bisexuality, which it seems she believed, in this phase of her work, to be the foundation of both conscious and unconscious activity. The poet's inability to conceive of such a state arose from the limitations that consciousness inevitably imposes on any goal to depict an _un_conscious substrata of experience; further, it became clear that the poet's consciousness, her own "inner" world, was itself a reflection of the "outer" world. Hence the final poem in this phase, "Diving Into The Wreck", not only reflects the problem of trying to move beyond consciousness to define a pure, unique unconscious realm, as it seems the poet intended; this poem also seems to indicate that Rich found it almost impossible to separate inner and outer worlds.

Where Rich's strength of vision did emerge in her exploration of the bisexual psyche was in the complex portrayal of the female sensibility in "Waking In The Dark." Now taking that "dream" as much as possible into the light of day, Rich begins to explore the meanings of strength and power as they are experienced by women. It is Rich's vision of female strength that is the source, in this new phase of her work, of images that express a thinking informed by the body.

Previously, "thinking through the body" was portrayed, as indicated in chapters one and two, in the symbolic terms of nature and androgyny. Now, in the poet's present concern with female strength, she illustrates how an awareness of the body itself, a groundedness *in* the body, as it is the source of our actions in the world, can re-vitalize thought. This body-awareness, Rich believes, is particularly common to women. It is, in fact, the source of their strength.[6] The poet suggests that once women have extricated themselves from "the institution of heterosexuality . . . a major buttress of male power",[7] becoming as a result "the presiding geniuses" of their bodies,[8] they can begin to experience their *natural* strengths. These women's freedom to experience their physicality, whether as lovers or friends, can, Rich believes, result in "a world in which women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children . . . but the visions and the thinking necessary to sustain, console and alter human existence."[9]

In the poems of *The Dream of a Common Language* and *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, Rich's belief that woman's strength of vision is linked to her knowledge of herself as a physical being is explored in an ever-expanding definition of what "physicality" means. The poet moves beyond a concept of power as the recognition of physical and emotional needs to a definition of power as the decision to act on the *actual* female experience, rather than be swayed by the conditioned notions of self condoned by patriarchy. This process is complicated by the poet's refusal to oversimplify issues, at the same time that she clearly wants to validate female strength. The meaning of power, re-visioned with reference to the independent woman, as well as to women living and working together, becomes a way of thinking and acting that is completely separate from stereotypical "male" concepts of power -- that is, power seen as domination and force.

In "Power" (1974), in The Dream of a Common Language, Rich illustrates the ways in which female strength has been misused as a result of patriarchal preconceptions. Marie Curie is the example of a woman "consumed" by her own ambitions:

> Her body bombarded for years   by the element
> she had purified
>
> She died   a famous woman[10]

Claire Keyes has observed that as early as Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law in 1962, Rich has depicted the problematic aspects of female creativity.[11] The present portrait of Marie Curie again explores the dangerous repercussions of the female drive to create; in this poem Rich does not emphasize Curie's successful experimentation, but rather the "wounds" that resulted from it. Curie's self-destruction is rooted in the fact that she negates her own body; she is driven entirely by her mental obsession. Ironically, she finally sacrifices her entire life, body and mind. Like the stereotypical nurturing female, she gives herself up to a cause that entirely depletes her. Nothing is truly creative, Rich intimates, if it requires this kind of self-abnegation.

It is also possible that the poet, given her abhorrence of contemporary violence, is intimating that Curie's discoveries -- and Curie herself -- were abused by the male-dominated culture in which she was a participant. Thus Curie's self-inflicted "wounds" are, in a sense, the result of her involvement in a culture, which, in upholding mind at the expense of body, has both damaged the scope of Curie's womanhood and the potential of her life's work.

As Rich strives to understand Curie's position, she compares herself to a "backhoe", to suggest the need to look beneath the surfaces of current definitions of success and failure. Rich "digs" and "divulges" out of a "crumbling flank of earth" (Dream, p.3); she probes the history of women but must herself provide the explanation that patriarchal thinking has ignored or overlooked; she desires also to seek "a tonic . . . for living on this earth" (Dream, p.3), a "resource" healthier than the one discovered by Curie. In her attempt to find this cure, Rich leaves us with an important insight into the famous chemist's death:

> her wounds   came   from the same source as her power
> (Dream, p.3)

The poet's "cure", then, is an insight that can be applied to the creative endeavours of women in general. The poem's conclusion, with "power" and "wounds" at opposite ends of the poetic line, and its repetitions of "deny", warn of the dangers in female creativity, particularly when there is a refusal to acknowledge the physical needs of the self.

In "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev" (1974), the poet's pessimism about the uses and misuses of feminine power again emerges as Rich depicts the tragedy of Elvira Shatayev, leader of a woman's climbing team; this woman died along with her company in a storm on Lenin Peak, August 1974.[12] It seems that Rich is striving in "Phantasia" to validate the communal energy that these women experienced; Marianne Whelchel describes this poem as a "fully realized vision of women in a cooperative, sustaining relationship that allows, even requires, the unity of love and power."[13] However, as in "Power", the body is sacrificed to the mind, in this case to Shatayev's ideal of a purely female love. Hence, throughout this poem, though Rich is eager to affirm female energy and communality, her ambivalence overshadows her admiration, just as the death of the climbers nearly eclipses their achievements.

The women's insights, their unity, are movingly depicted by the poet:

> After the long training   the early sieges
> we are moving almost effortlessly in our love
>
> We will not live
> to settle for less.   We have dreamed of this
> all of our lives (Dream, p.6)

This union of female strength is, however, symbolized by the mountain climb, which is also associated with isolation and death. And, ironically enough, the poem actually begins with the death of the climbers; it is from this "sleep" that Shatayev speaks of the women's communal experience with "a voice no longer personal" (Dream, p.4). The poem depicts from Shatayev's perspective the events that led to the women's deaths. Each woman had for years felt her own energy, her "yes" building; finally these female adventurers came together; now their collective power is, Shatayev declares, "out of all words" (Dream, p.4).

In this poem, Rich is, it seems, striving to define a source of female strength that is a tangible energy, and one beyond any current definition. Sadly, though, the women's vitality has led them to their destruction. Further, whether Rich intends such a meaning or not, it is the women's speechlessness, their existence beyond words, that emphasizes their inability to speak because of their death. Similarly, the women, "[their] frozen eyes unribboned", have the unearthly power to "stitch" . . . the blueness of the sky together . . . "like a quilt" (Dream, p.5), to, it seems, completely re-conceive the nature of the world; but they achieve this ability to "re-vision" at the cost of their lives. Shatayev's "forces", "so taken up and shared/and given back" (Dream, p.5), finally remain only as an abstract value:

> When you have buried us   told your story
> ours does not end   we stream
> into the unfinished   the unbegun
> the possible (Dream, p.5)

The movement through the poem is, then, from the team's feeling of their strength, to their speaking from death to finally their transformation into a remote, unearthly realm of yet-to-be-conceived possibility. Shatayev's husband, depicted as an interloper on both the women and the natural scene, his "cleated bootsoles leaving their geometric bite" in the snow (Dream, p.4), is the survivor. The broken rhythm of the poem, as though imitating Shatayev's gasping last breath, emphasizes that though she has achieved this union with other women, she is now beyond experiencing it in the actual world.

The ambivalence that Rich has expressed with regard to the application of female energy in "Power" and "Phantasia" is more directly confronted in "Origins and History of Consciousness" (1972-74). In this three-part poem, in which a woman turns away from the cultural pressures to conform to heterosexuality and embraces lesbianism, Rich suggests that the strength of woman, her true strength, emerges when she rejects social conventions, including cultural notions of power and achievement, and acts instead on the basis of her actual experience as a female. It seems that Rich is suggesting that Curie, and even Shatayev, who felt within herself a source of female energy that could not be denied, acted on "male" or conventional conceptions of power. Their acts of will denied the body and led to their destruction. Now, in "Origins", the vision of female strength that Rich depicts is not "single"-minded determination. The source of woman's strength begins with the acknowledgement of the body and its needs; once woman has realized her authentic self as opposed to the culturally imposed feminine identity, she can reach out and love another person. The trust and understanding that can develop between two women who reject patriarchy and tap their own sources of energy gives them "a common language", which, unlike the "oppressor's language", can permit both self-fulfillment and creative communal activity.

In the first section of "Origins", this "drive / to connect",[14] that is, the need to understand one's experiences and to communicate them in a meaningful way with another person, is inhibited by "the whiteness of the wall / behind the poems" (Dream, p.7). This "whiteness", representing the absence of examples of female strength, female love, makes life for the poet-persona "a crisis."

The poet uses the symbol of the crucifixion to represent her own efforts to expand the meaning of "female." Her aim as a feminist is to move beyond the restrictive conventions and traditions of patriarchy, and to resurrect a new radical vision of woman. In particular, Rich uses Erich Neumann's The Origins and History of Consciousness as a male vision of femininity from which she diverges to depict a history that is unique to female experience: the decision to become lesbian.

Rich begins to define the origins of women's strength, then, by linking her rejection of the accepted patriarchal vision of life and literature to a rejection of heterosexuality. When she claims that "[her] envy is not simple" in thinking of "the experienced crucifixions" of lovers (Dream, p.7), she cleverly expresses her ambivalence about both conforming and not conforming to convention. On the one hand, she clearly sees heterosexual relations, like the crucifixion, as a sacrifice of the body for the sake of the spirit; yet on the other hand, she still yearns, it seems, for the blind faith that allows the lovers to accept the conventional relationship and the unquestioned avenues of behaviour. The poet-persona's rejection of heterosexuality and the codes of patriarchy is envisioned as "walking into clear water ringed by a snowy wood / white as cold sheets", an act which, she fears, can only result in the death of the only "self" she knows: the one culture has imposed.

But it is, in fact, in breaking with heterosexual conventions that the poet-persona's energies begin to be restored. The absence she anticipated is, instead, a kind of rebirth. "The water / is mild" (Dream, p.7); the poet-persona floats there, realizing that in asserting the needs that originated in her body, in acknowledging her sexuality as a phenomenon separate from cultural conditioning, she is "clear now / of the hunter, the trapper / the wardens of the mind" (Dream, p.7). This is the genesis of the poet's particular history of women, and unlike Neumann's perception of the feminine as the essential complement to masculinity, the poet depicts woman seeking a physical bond with another woman.

In section two of the poem, what Rich describes as the ease of taking "each other's lives into our hands, as bodies" (Dream, p.8), is, she realizes, only the first step in beginning to live as fully aware, sensate and sensitive women. Their rejection of heterosexuality gives the lesbian lovers the power to "conceive" of each other: that is, to acknowledge their physical needs and begin to truly live. But until they "wake" from the fertile darkness of their physicality, until they confront the "common, acute particularity" of everyday living (Dream, p.8), they are shadows, not people. They must, therefore, try to understand the paradoxes of "loving the flesh" and "the mugger" in the street. Each must acknowledge "her own inward scream" (Dream, p.8).

In section three, Rich elaborates further on the need to face the "acute particularity" of life, as it is central to the sources of woman's strength, to her rebirth. Rich claims it is not "simple" to

> wake from sleep into the neighbourhood
> of one neither strange nor familiar
> whom we have chosen to trust. (Dream, p.9)

However, the lesbian lovers' courage, their climbing "downward hand over hand as on a rope that quivered / over the unsearched" (Dream, p.9), must be tested even further -- as they dare to be entirely open to each other. Until they embrace each other's lives more completely, not just as bodies, but as entire and intricate human beings, their "history" is a primitive one,

> where the night becomes [their] inner darkness, and sleeps
> like a dumb beast, head on her paws, in the corner.
> (Dream, p.9)

This revised conception of woman, then, links female strength to lesbianism. The lesbian lovers are "climbers" as were Elvira

Shatayev's team, but in breaking with patriarchal conventions, their journeying is into their inner domain. In turning inward, the two women in "Origins" face the undeniable needs of the body; and these needs can result in an even deeper "physicality" as the women choose to take an all-embracing attitude toward the multi-levelled experience of their shared life. Having no predetermined love-rituals, no destructive norms to be influenced by, their sole source of strength will be their trust, their deep love for one another.

In the "Twenty-One Love Poems" (1974-76), Rich continues to describe the power that is inherent in the lesbian relationship. This conception of female energy, as Mary J. Carruthers describes it, "springs . . . from the perception that women together and in themselves have a power which is transformative, but that in order to recover their power women need to move psychically and through metaphor to a place beyond the well-travelled routes of patriarchy . . . ."[15] Hence Rich's concern in this section of The Dream of a Common Language is with the creation of a new way of life that is made possible when women try to tap their authentic sources of power. Again, it is the physical love between the two women which gives them the incentive to begin living afresh. This "erotic connection", observes Carruthers, is "the primary energy of the senses which is both physical and intellectual."[16] Further, the depth of trust of which Rich conceives requires that the lesbian lovers face the limitations and rewards that are inherent in all aspects of their lives, whether physical or intellectual, personal or public. As the first-person persona articulates her deepest thoughts and feelings to both her loved one and to the reader, it seems that the strength that was initially based on trust now evolves into the more profound power that results from recreating the meaning of life -- as it is lived, and as it can be expressed through new perceptions of language. In the "Love Poems", the energy suppressed by Curie and Shatayev is now expressed, infusing the poems with re-vitalized images and rhythms.

In Poem I, the poet-persona observes that the actual experiences of the lovers have not been "imagined" by their literary heritage; likewise the lesbians have no official history. However, the strength of these women is derived from their decision to live out their untold history; their choice of lifestyle embodies the expanded definition of "physicality", so central to female power, that Rich has been exploring. The lesbians' "animal passion"[17] is at the source of their strength. Rich compares these women to trees, "rooted" in the city, surviving in spite of the city's "sulphuric air"; their "exuberant budding" symbolizes their vitality as they accept the "acute particularity" of the urban world, "[grasping] [their] lives inseparable / from . . . pornography . . . rainsoaked garbage, the tabloid cruelties . . ." (Dream, p.25). This, then, is a life in which the lovers accept what they are, and what they can and cannot change. The sense of movement in the poem, as though these women are walking through the streets, the vital imagery of the tree "blazing" and "budding", both suggest the vigor of this life which, as Rich declares in Poem VII, is lived out as it is imagined.

In Poem XIII, the poet-persona further mythologizes the lesbian experience in suggesting that such women must take the language of patriarchy and use it to express their unique vision. The women in this poem are on an exploration of language and life:

> out in a country that has no language
> no laws . . .
> whatever [they] do is pure invention . . .[18]

As they "[drive] through the desert / wondering if the water will hold out" (Dream, p.31), Rich suggests that their survival without the usual cultural supports, is, at times, uncertain. Yet their "hallucinations turn to simple villages" (Dream, p.31): their dreams of survival, of the fertile oasis, gradually become a simple, but tangible, reality; this reality is based on a re-visioning of conventional notions of living. A woman's voice "singing old songs / with new words" (Dream, p.31) will make known the experiences of women. Hence, though Joanne Fiet Diehl is correct in noting that Rich does not succeed in re-inventing names for the lesbian experience,[19] the poet does, nevertheless, find a realistic solution in feminist re-visioning. The bass notes of this new woman-centred music are, Rich states, not overpowering, but quiet, as if to suggest that the women, in their seeming acquiescence, can still assert their identity. The flute "plucked and fingered by women outside the law" (Dream, p.31) suggests the possible reversals and transformations that can occur as women begin to describe their experiences in their own way.

The re-visioning is extended in Poem XVII to a re-definition of the meaning of love. The poet-persona declares, "no one is fated or doomed to love anyone";[20] that is merely the "story" women are told, and the story that they make of their lives. Rich declares that Tristan und Isolde, with its "poison cup" and "penance" (Dream, p.33) must be replaced by the experiences of "real" women. This, Rich claims, is the difference between love and death, a difference women should know and admit. Death for the poet means acceptance of cultural norms that never "listened" to women, never allowed them to establish a heritage that would help them "instruct" each other. She defines love as the willingness to acknowledge the forces "within" and "without"; this awareness of self and the forces that work against true selfhood is, as I stated earlier, "physicality" as a life perspective in which all aspects of life must be understood:

> this we were, this is how we tried to love,
> and these are the forces they had ranged against us,
> and these are the forces we had ranged within us,
> within us and against us, against us and within us.
> (Dream, p.34)

The repetitions of "within" and "against", the sense of a consciousness looking within and without, emphasize the effort and energy required to be "physical": that is, to experience life to the full.

In Poem XIX the poet re-conceives her life in deciding not only to accept the harshest realities -- "winter, city, anger, poverty, and death"[21] -- but also to live fully in this "present." Her face is "naked": stripped of false idealism, empty conviction, she must admit "there are no miracles" (Dream, p.34). However, in trying to live life as it is there is an ultimate reward for which to strive; the poet declares that the bond between two people is "heroic in its ordinariness" (Dream, p.35). This newly-defined "miracle" is heroic because, as the poet-persona tells us, "nothing in civilization" makes love "simple" (Dream, p.35). Love, by the poet's definition, is not just emotion but a total way of life, embracing body and mind; it is "heroic" because the "ordinary", when lived with "the fiercest attention" (Dream, p.35), no longer has any relation to our usual sense of ordinary as "mundane." Instead, everyday life is a challenging, tumultuous course. It is the "slow-picked, halting traverse of a pitch" (Dream, p.35). This energetic commitment to life, emphasized by the rhythm of the poem, becomes, Rich states, "routine." In using the words "routine" and "ordinary" in these new ways, Rich stresses the break with conventional notions of self; in requiring the reader to ponder both old and new meanings, she demands an active encounter with the poem; this is an extension of her belief in "fierce attention" to all aspects of life. Further, her ambiguous final remark, "look at the faces of those who have chosen it", intimates that not many people are capable of this awareness; this concluding line also suggests that if one does attempt to be attuned to life in body and mind, it will be apparent to others. This living with all of the faculties alert may be what Rich has described in On Lies, Secrets and Silence as the feminist choice to take a stand against "the passivity of the twentieth century mind", a passivity which is, Rich believes, manipulated by contemporary culture.[22]

It seems then that the lesbian experience, requiring a new language and a new way of living, becomes a self-perpetuating source of energy. The mythologizing of their experiences allows for what Carruthers describes as a new "wholeness of being."[23] Further, this reborn self can now draw on the strength of an integrated lifestyle, in order to channel even more power, "the fiercest attention" into keeping in touch with and acting on the actual experience.

But the freedom and confidence that the lesbian couple experience as they participate in life's "acute particularity" is, in a sense, undermined in Rich's depiction of her experiences with people and events extraneous to the love relationship. The difficulties that the poet was able to transcend with the mutual support of her lover are problems not so easily surmounted in her interactions with the public world. In the final section of The Dream of a Common Language, in a poem entitled "A Woman Dead In

Her Forties" (1974-77), Rich illustrates that "thinking through the body", the female strength to act on the actual experience rather than be swayed by convention, by a culture of the mind, is often inhibited in spite of her "fiercest attention" to her needs. Hence, in this poem, in which Rich reflects on her friendship with a woman who has died of cancer, the poet-persona depicts her own conflict between what she wishes she had said to her friend, and what she actually did:

> I would have touched my fingers
> to where your breasts had been
> but we never did such things 24

In this poem, in which scars symbolize a denial of the self, both the poet-persona and her friend suffer from their refusal to express themselves. Rich regrets her denial of love for the friend who has now died of cancer. Her friend, the "dean of women", dies as a result of both her chosen lifestyle and cancer. In fact, the poet links the "rush of cells" (Dream, p.58) that cause the woman's death with the career and lifestyle she chose. Both women are "scarred" because they did not realize -- or in Rich's case, realize too late -- that their real "choice" was not to adopt a conventionalized notion of "woman", but to express their true needs. The result of their refusal of self is their suffering -- both physical and emotional.

Looking back on this friendship, the poet-persona remembers that, as children, sleeping side-by-side, the love between her and her friend "took the form of jokes and mute . . . loyalty" (Dream, p.55). As adults, Rich wore "the face of the proper marriage", her friend, "the face of the independent woman" (Dream, p.55). Throughout their friendship, the poet suggests that both women believed,

> There are things I will not share
> with everyone (Dream, p.53)

Rich wonders now at her own reservations -- what she has withheld from both herself, and her friend:

> what did I hide from her
> what have I denied her
> what losses suffered (Dream, p.54)

For she realizes that her friend is "every woman [she] ever loved" (Dream, p.54). Further, had the poet communicated openly, she recognizes that her friend might have validated her experiences, might have confirmed for her, "everything you feel is true" (Dream, p.56). The tragedy depicted in the poem is, as Rich realizes, that her realizations have come too late. What has kept her in check throughout her friend's life was not just herself, but what her friend represents -- conformity and denial of actual experience -- cultural mores that both women were unknowingly victimized by. Yet Rich was saved by the "uncontrollable light which began to pour from every wound and suture" (Dream, p.54). In contrasting her own "healing", presumably the result of her growing feminist consciousness, with the equally powerful reality of her friend's diseased body, Rich suggests both the control that our bodies exert over our lives, as well as the close tie between the body and our seemingly "rational" "conscious" choices. Rich must also admit, though, that there is much we cannot understand or control; and that it is impossible to apply one's own beliefs to the life of another:

> I didn't know your choice
>
> or how by then you had no choice

Rich learns from this experience that her responsibility, her strength comes in being honest with herself:

> . . . I never told you how I loved you
> we never talked at your deathbed of your death (Dream, p.57)

She vows to try to be more honest in the future -- "more crazy mourning, more howl, more keening" (Dream, p.58). Her strength comes from her determination to validate her emotions; but in the actual situation she illustrates the almost insurmountable taboos against such self-exposure.

In "Transcendental Etude" (1977), the frustrations that the poet initially faces in recognizing the ways that culture has denied her validation for her authentically female experience is gradually transformed into the profound strength made possible through faith. However, Rich's faith is not the conventionally "transcendent" belief. Instead, as the poet observes the Vermont countryside, as she ponders the details of everyday living, she finds a faith that is tangibly, physically based in woman's experience. Rich's portrait of a female or feminist consciousness and way of life has been described by Jane Vanderbosch as the creation of "a new landscape that is metaphorically within the body of women."[25] However, the body itself is central, in Rich's belief, to woman's experience; it is not only a "metaphor", but also an intrinsic part of the female life that Rich is charting.

The poem begins in ambivalence. On the one hand the poet perceives the vitality and tranquility of the natural world, the air, "clear-tuned, cricket-throbbing."[26] Yet this natural beauty is, sadly, "already sentimentalized, photographed, / advertised to death"; its false glamour hides even harsher truths -- "hit and run hunters" and "poverty gnashing its teeth like a blind cat" (Dream, p.72). The poet concludes that the levels of life and vision are boundless, and "a lifetime is too narrow / to understand it all" (Dream, p.73).

Rich then transposes the "fragile beauty", the "minute" and "momentary" qualities of the natural world to a consideration of her own life as a woman, which is, of course, even more complex. She intimates that, had she been told to "study" her life like "natural history / or music", perhaps her achievements as a feminist, as a woman, would have been greater; perhaps she would have succeeded in "[leaping] into transcendence" (Dream, p.73).

But human existence is not so simple. Not only must we all "take on / everything at once" (Dream, p.73), but also Rich declares that the "wrenching-apart" from the mother, this crucial physical deprivation, is imposed too soon. This physical denial, also a withdrawal of a most basic bond between women, and a source of knowledge and strength, is reflected in the poet's frustrations with feminism:

> Everything . . . seems beyond us,
> . . . nothing that was said
> is true for us . . . (Dream, p.74)

However, a new-found strength can be tapped in acceptance of the actualities of the female experience, and in the decision to be honest to this sense of self:

> The longer I live the more I mistrust
> theatricality, the false glamour cast
> by performance, the more I know its poverty beside
> the truths we are salvaging from
> the splitting-open of our lives. (Dream, p.74)

Here she suggests that, though she could strive for formal control in her poetry and conventional control in her life, she rejects this false strength and chooses instead to stand as she is -- someone puzzling over life with no clear answers. Her strength is the honesty of her thoughts and feelings. This honesty means "to pull back from the incantations, / rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly" (Dream, p.74), and finally to "bestow / ourselves to silence . . ." facing "the pitch of utter loneliness" (Dream, p.75). However, the poet-persona can be "re-membered", not "dis-membered" by her loneliness if, her "mind / one with her body" (Dream, p.77), she decides to love "as only a woman can love" (Dream, p.76). As in the lesbian relationship in the "Twenty-One Love Poems", the love that the poet describes is love extended to another woman. This relationship does not resemble the "will to mastery" familiar to many conventional friendships or love affairs. It is part of a new way of life, a new way of thinking; characterized by the concern with the details of actual experience, with "the many-lived, unending / forms in which she finds herself" (Dream, p.77), the female mind depicted is a complex, particularistic consciousness:

> bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps,
>
> and the darkblue petal of the petunia,
> and the dry darkbrown lace of seaweed . . . (Dream, p.76)

It is, Rich declares, in turning away from conventional "argument and jargon", in being true to the female perspective, that "vision begins to happen."

The "self" is integrated:

> becoming now the shard of broken glass
> slicing light in a corner, dangerous
> to flesh, now the plentiful, soft leaf
> that wrapped round the throbbing finger, soothes the wound.
> (Dream, p.77)

The woman, at one with herself and with other women, is also a vital part of the natural world. She compares her strength to the "rock-shelf . . . forming under everything that grows" (Dream, p.77) -- the foundation of faith she had earlier despaired of grasping.

The transmutation of power, evolving from love to acceptance to faith, is Rich's affirmation of the strength of feminism. This faith allows the poet to conceive of a life in which the female self is not denied physically, emotionally or intellectually. However, her faith is achieved in a poem in which the poet is more concerned with the issues of feminism than with "actual" experience; because of her concentration on her ideals rather than everyday reality, she skirts some of the more difficult questions of practical living that "A Woman Dead In Her Forties" raises. Only in the ideal world is honesty as "natural" as the apples on the trees, and feminism as stable as the rocks that cradle the multi-levelled life of nature.

Rich's desire to present her faith in feminism as the ultimate female strength is continued in A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far. In a number of poems in this volume, Rich attempts to create a sense of community as women, past and present, from various walks of life, are depicted living out their feminist beliefs. Though feminism, as Rich perceives, is a powerful force, its strength is constantly undermined by the effects of patriarchal culture. In trying to come to terms with both the achievements of the feminist movement and the inescapable restrictions of patriarchy, Rich continues to waver between idealism and realism in her depiction of the community of women.

"Culture and Anarchy" (1978), in A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far, valorizes feminism by weaving the experiences of early feminists with the poet's own activities as a writer and as a woman performing the tasks of the day. The sense of building energy, created both structurally and thematically in juxtaposing the lives of many women, emphasizes Rich's belief that feminism, as the expression of female experience, is a "physicality" not merely of the body; it is a communion of understanding among all women. In illustrating the power of feminism, the poet also supplements the "common language" of feminists by exploring and "re-visioning" the meanings of "culture" and "anarchy."

In the course of the poem, Rich considers Susan B. Anthony in her role as wife and anti-abolitionist; she calls to mind Jane Addams who "refused to be content"[27] with isolated intellectual pursuits. A letter from Elizabeth Barrett to Anna Jameson highlights for Rich the earlier poet's interest in the liberation of all oppressed peoples. Rich takes note of other women central to feminist reform and knowledge; she also acknowledges those women who have yet to confront their oppression, or who live in isolation from their sisters.

As the poet-persona sits at her work table, the vitality of these female figures, "the torrent of . . . typing" (Patience, p.11) as Rich's companion works nearby, and the poet's own musings about women's liberation gather momentum and seem to merge and become part of the natural world outside the window. Like "daylilies", women have had to "run wild" (Patience, p.10) to truly grow; they have had to escape the confines of patriarchy, becoming what might conventionally been seen as "anarchic"; yet the activities of feminists past and present, compared not only to wild flowers, but also to a building thunderstorm, are, undeniably a "culture"; women have, Rich notes, for centuries "borne, / tended, soothed, cauterized, / stanched, cleansed, absorbed, endured . . ." (Patience, p.14). Further,the persistence of early feminists working "for the full/ development of [woman's] forces of mind and body" (Patience, p.15) has resulted in the creation of a feminist heritage.

However, Rich realizes that women's gift for nurturing, as well as their literature, their history,have gone "unnoticed" or "greatly misrepresented" (Patience, p.14). And the fight against the forces of patriarchy, like many reform movements, has been what Rich describes as a "false dawn" (Patience, p.14).

This conflict between feminisim, a powerful, highly civilized movement even in its seeming "wildness", and patriarchal culture, that which represses both nature and women, is resolved as Rich continues to draw parallels between the life-giving forces of nature and the feminist movement. Like the storm brewing outside the window, the energy and determination of these women will continue to build, will grow more and more tangible and powerful

> finally the bursting of the sky
> power, release (Patience, p.12)

For the poet, even the simplest tasks of the day, like picking the vegetables for dinner "while the strength is in the leaves" (Patience, p.15), seem to express the female power that Rich intimates is continuing to expand and find expression in both public and private realms. The earliest feminist letters, diary excerpts, speeches, and descriptions of household tasks combine with an ever-stronger momentum to convey the powerful consciousness of women, and the poet's love and respect for their endeavours. Feminism, then, in its communality,provides the poet with the strength of purpose to pursue her own goals, to uphold her dream of a "common language."

In the eight-part poem "Turning The Wheel" (1981), Rich moves from a consideration of feminism to the depiction of another kind of female community. The poet observes that the heritage of native Indian women, vitally connected to their physicality and to nature, has been undermined by both men and women from patriarchal culture. Though Rich continues to validate female strength, maintaining even in this poem that it is constantly struggling to survive and assert itself, the poet is all too aware of the all-pervasive restrictions that culture exerts over both women and nature, past and present.

The title of the poem, "Turning The Wheel",[28] suggests the dilemma that Rich confronts in this poem: how is she going to "steer" her way amidst the obstacles of patriarchy and still believe in the strength of women, and how can she maintain her faith in the powerful physicality of women when she observes that it is constantly "routed backward" (Patience, p.56) by culture?

The first section, entitled "Location", depicts the desert; made even more desolate by the effects of culture, it is described as "poor, conquered, bulldozed" (Patience, p.52). Everything, whether of nature or culture, has been neutralized: the Spanish arcade, the "faceless" old woman grinding corn, even the saguaro "shot through with bullet holes" (Patience, p.52), no longer have an intrinsic meaning. Instead, they are cultural artifacts, empty representations of life rather than life itself. Yet the poet's description of the cactus, seeming to "give the finger to it all" (Patience, p.52), suggests that she sees some sort of "natural" life, however feeble, asserting itself in spite of present restraints.

In "Burden Baskets", Rich begins to focus on female experience as it, like the desert, has been "colonized" by patriarchy. The poet declares that even "the lesbian archeologist", trying to recover a female heritage, is a victim of this culture which negates the experience of women so completely that they themselves believe "the standard version", "the false history" (*Patience*, p.53). The puberty rites of the Apache women illustrate this process of negating the actual female experience. The burden baskets, woven for the Indian women's puberty celebrations, must have, at one time, been associated with the importance of women's physicality. Now these baskets on display in the museum are filled with strange "offerings" -- "cans of diet Pepsi, peanut brittle,/ Cracker Jack, Hershey bars" (*Patience*, p.53). This display, so shocking to the poet, has been almost ignored in terms of sociological or anthropological documentation. No attempt has been made to understand the apparent connection between female sexuality and consumerism, or to determine how such a celebration of puberty would affect woman's sense of her physicality and her experience of life. Instead, the text accompanying the baskets,

> . . . like a patient voice tired of explaining
> goes on to explain a different method of weaving.
> (*Patience*, p.53)

In sections three and four, entitled "Hohokam" and "Self-Hatred", the poet continues to depict the devastation of female culture, focussing throughout on the way patriarchy insidiously negates the "natural" or physical impulse, imposing instead the artificial. In section three Rich links the female experience to a prehistoric tribe, the Hohokam, whose name means "*those who have ceased*"(*Patience*, p.54). No one, not even the poet, can imagine these people. They have been wiped out, Rich suggests, by a culture which, beneath its seeming desire to create a more prosperous and plentiful life, is actually life-denying. Thus the "jets of spray" of the rich contemporary farmer "half-erode", "half-flood" the land (Patience, p.54). The Indian woman, associated with magical power and with nature, carrying water to living fields, has, Rich declares, even "withdrawn her ghost" (Patience, p.54). Culture has, Rich intimates, denied our bond with the natural world to such an extent that even the spirit of that way of life cannot be imagined by us.

Again in "Self-Hatred", Rich emphasizes how woman's sense of integrity, particularly her bond with the natural world, has been undermined. In this section Rich tries to identify with an Indian woman of the past, working on a tapestry. Once she embroidered birds and serpents but now, because she has been told she is "primitive", she works into her tapestry a scene that denies nature, and denies her authentic experience of self, the "scene of flagellants, / each whip . . . accurately self-directed" (Patience, p.55).

In section five, "Particularity", Rich fights against the oppressive effects of culture by trying to bring alive in her own imagination "the desert witch, the shamaness" (Patience, p.56) of the Hohokam. Rich rejects archetype, symbol, ready-made abstractions; she affirms the physicality of the "real" woman, declaring that the abstractions of culture, in denying this life of the body, keep female power "routed backward" (Patience, p.57). However, this valuing of experience in the physical is only a momentary focus; the poet in "Apparition", section six, counters it with all of the fabricated identities of culture. If the shamaness is, like a dream image, a fiery apparition, if she is "skirted like a Christian", if she is "shawled in dust" (Patience, p.57), do not, Rich warns, assume you "know" her, for these are only the frames of perception which we have been given; these have nothing to do with the actual woman; with "still-bristling hair" (Patience, p.57), she is alive in a physical and natural way that has no relation, it seems, to these cultural interpretations.

The portrait of Mary Jane Colter in section seven of the poem depicts a "white" woman, who, as part of patriarchy, has lost her integrity much as the Indian woman has. Though Colter was not a part of the natural world of the Indians, she did love these people, and hoped, through her architecture, to erect a monument to their way of life. Rich quotes one of Colter's letters to her family:

> I want this glory,
> I want to place my own conception
> and that of the Indians whose land this was
> at the edge of this incommensurable thing. (Patience, p.58)

The poet does not overtly comment on Colter in the poem itself. But her earlier depictions of the desert as a cultural wasteland, the Indian people as enfeebled and pathetic, suggest that Colter's need for "glory", however honourable, is, as Rich does state explicitly in the notes on the poems, "inextricable from the violation and expropriation of Native culture by white entrepreneurs."[29]

In the final section of this poem, "Turning The Wheel", Rich is about to enter the Canyon, which she sees as a symbol of femaleness:

> the face
> of annihilating and impersonal time
> stained in the colors of a woman's genitals
> outlasting every transient violation (Patience, p.59)

In linking womanhood to the indestructible rock of the Canyon, Rich affirms her faith in the strength of women, a strength that, like that of the natural world, is basic to all manifestations of life. However, in spite of this realization, Rich "turns the wheel"; she is unable to continue her journey into the canyon.

Perhaps she turns back because the obvious conflicts between nature and culture, which the poem has illustrated, are too painful to be confronted. Throughout the poem, women, associated by Rich with their physicality, have been, like the canyon, both enduring and constantly subordinated to culture, a male culture. It seems that Rich's awareness of this never-ending struggle has undermined her own strength; she declares that she feels "too alone" to continue her journey. However, it is also true that she is "too filled" with a loved one who, though not on the journey, is ever-present in the poet's mind. It seems then, that even in the painful recognition of woman's negation by patriarchy, the bonds between women will persist, and even " outlast every transient violation" (Patience, p.59).

In this phase of her work, Rich has attempted to depict her conception of "thinking through the body" as it is related to the female strength or power that can be tapped through woman's physicality. The poet's vision of female power has evolved from a belief in the importance of the body per se to the assertion of the actual, as opposed to conditioned, needs of the entire person living in harmony with both nature and culture. Such a conception of female power, as a total awareness of self and other, diverges greatly from patriarchal notions of conquest -- whether it be conquest of woman, nature or culture. Rich's success in this phase will be determined by her success in finding images that affirm the value of this definition of power.

Rich begins her exploration of power in two early poems by delineating the ways that power can be misused if it is conceived, as it has been in patriarchy, to mean force and single-minded determination. Such a conception of power in "Power" and "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev" does not, however, bring destruction to everything outside the self as male power often does; rather, Rich illustrates how the conventional notions of power deny the physical and emotional aspects of the seemingly powerful person; thus, power as ambition is revealed by the poet to be _self_-destructive. In "Power" (_Dream_), images like that of Curie's suppurating finger tips work effectively to emphasize how profoundly her ambition took precedence over the well-being of her "self." The poem's repetition of "deny" suggests that it is Curie herself who refused to acknowledge her own suffering.

Similarly in "Phantasia" (_Dream_), as Elvira Shatayev and her female climbing team sacrifice body to mind, they inevitably destroy themselves. The image of the mountain climb symbolizes these women's vitality; but the image of the snowstorm, which takes their lives, effectively illustrates their misuse of their powerful vitality.

In "Origins and History of Consciousness" (_Dream_), a new definition of female power is beginning to emerge. The lesbian lovers, now beyond the realm of male influence, are not only in touch with the needs of the body; the meaning of their physicality is extended to signify their decision to accept each other, not just as bodies, but as whole beings, both sensate and sensitive.

The poet uses the image of an animal seeking another animal to suggest that the love between the women remains a primitive impulse until they are able to achieve the trust required to embrace each other's lives in their entirety.

In the "Twenty-One Love Poems" (Dream), the power that the poet has implied will be tapped when the lesbian couple are completely committed to and trusting of each other is realized. Now the images associated with power begin to suggest a healthy "thinking through the body" rather than the denial and death of the body for the sake of the mind. The most effective images associated with the female lovers are those which suggest a living-in-the-moment that requires knowing oneself -- "the forces within", and accepting the actual world -- "the forces without" (Dream, p.34). The ebb and flow effect of this constant surveillance of inner and outer worlds embodies the constant energy and growth that the lesbian couple experience as they define a life for themselves, a life in which their needs are recognized, named and fulfilled. Whether it be through the image of the tree, rooted in the city, budding in spite of pollution, or in utilizing the image of the tumultuous pitch of rough waters, the poet suggests the intense and total involvement in life to which these women are committed.

We should note, however, that the images Rich utilizes, while they are inspirational, do not convey realistically what "thinking through the body" means in everyday, human terms. How, for example, does one live "like a tree"? A more practical understanding of Rich's images is made possible if one sees them in conjunction with her re-visioning of language, a process central to the "Love Poems." When the lesbian women begin to acknowledge their needs and construct a new life, they must take the old "tunes" of patriarchy and substitute the words of female experience. As they do so, the meaning of not only power, but of love, of "routine", of "ordinariness", all change. Their new meanings are tied to the poet's belief that "physicality" is "fierce attention" to the details of everyday living. This is true female power; it transforms love into deep awareness and acceptance of self and other; it makes our daily "routines" heroic rather than mundane, and the ordinary becomes a miracle.

However, the tremendous power that the lesbian couple have generated in re-visioning the meaning of life is blocked as they attempt to interact with other people beyond the microcosm of their own relationship. Now Rich tries to realistically explore how one might stay in touch with one's actual feelings and not feel thwarted or alienated in the public world. The taboos against genuine feeling and self-exposure are the focus of "A Woman Dead In Her Forties." The image of "the rush of cells" (Dream, p.58) that signifies the death by cancer of the poet's friend, a "dean of women" (Dream, p. 56), is apt in illustrating the results of a life of repressed emotion, of succumbing to the conventions of patriarchy. However, even the poet herself, whose body is not diseased, but filled with "uncontrollable light" (Dream, p.54), is inhibited from communicating her love for her friend; and though she vows to keep trying to be honest, she also admits that "thinking through the body", acting on one's actual feelings, may in some environments be virtually impossible.

The solution that the poet finds, adherence to the ideals of feminism, is convincingly portrayed in "Transcendental Etude" (Dream) because it is mirrored by Rich's faith in the complex workings of the natural world. This faith is not other-worldly, but is, instead, grounded in the actualities of everyday life. Initially both nature and the poet-persona's experiences as a woman are perceived as intricate and beyond human comprehension. But the "minute, momentary life [of nature] -- slugs, moles, pheasants, gnats" (Dream, p.73) and "the many-lived, unending/forms" (Dream, p.77) that female experience embraces become a source of faith as the poet accepts what she cannot know or understand; and the portrayal of her feminist consciousness becomes the embodiment of a particularistic, rather than transcendental vision. In this "thinking through the body", a merging with the everyday world that transcends the "will to mastery", the poet-persona finds tremendous strength. The image of the rockshelf, at first the inscrutable foundation of life, is finally, through faith, perceived as the source of vitality and stability underlying the myriad levels of existence. This vision is reinforced in "Culture and Anarchy" (Patience) which compares the force of feminism to a building storm; the poet again affirms her faith in the cumulative and ever-transforming power of women.

In "Turning The Wheel" (Patience), Rich attempts to integrate the power of women into the actual world in a way that she could not do in "A Woman Dead In Her Forties." In order to balance successfully the idealism of "Transcendental Etude" and "Culture and Anarchy" with the realism of "A Woman", Rich attempts to extend the meaning of a powerful female physicality to mean faith in one's ideals as they are restrained, but ever-present in the real world. Rich resourcefully uses the image of the Grand Canyon to embody this strong vision of survival. Though the canyon has, like woman, been violated time and time again by the activities of "culture", Rich asserts that this "female core . . . the face / of annihilating and impersonal time" (Patience, p.59) is so elemental that it cannot be destroyed. In comparison, patriarchy is but a "transient violation" (Patience, p.59). This confrontation with reality is painful -- the poet decides that she cannot confront all that the canyon represents to her, and she cuts her journey short. However, in facing the actual condition of women, and yet affirming their strength to survive, Rich illustrates the power of her feminist beliefs. She also extends the meaning of "thinking through the body" to encompass realistic awareness of the actual world.

Conclusion

Throughout Rich's exploration of "thinking through the body", the creation of a feminist consciousness has also been in process. As the poet has moved from a consideration of nature and natural human sources in Leaflets and The Will to Change, to an investigation of the mind in Diving Into The Wreck, to finally, in the more recent poetry of The Dream of A Common Language and A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far, a depiction of the female community, the concept of a uniquely feminist perspective, with its distinctive emphasis on distinguishing between authentic and culturally-imposed experience, has evolved.

In Leaflets and The Will to Change, Rich conceived of "thinking through the body" as an understanding of the human relationship to nature. Such a vision was based on the poet's perception that woman's biology, its cycles and rhythms, is a phenomenon that seems to mirror the workings of the natural world. In defining a feminist consciousness, Rich begins with this fundamental relation between women and nature; the poet undertakes to translate the pulsations of the body, woman's connection with nature, into images which express the process she calls "thinking through the body." Her exploration initially entails acknowledgement of the meaning of reproductive functions; however, Rich's vision evolves beyond the body itself, embracing in "Planetarium" (Will) and "Tear Gas"(Poems), the value inherent in female intuitions and female emotion; in the last stage of this re-visioning of the relation of woman and nature, Rich attempts to depict "the moment of change", the energy source which underlies any human act, a fusing of physical, emotional and thinking experience.

In "Images", Rich defines the aesthetic procedure to be utilized in capturing "the moment of change" (Will). However, the problem that this poem raises is that, because it is a poetic manifesto, it describes abstract ideas such as "interior monologue" (Will, p.49), rather than the poet's goal, which is a thinking fused with the knowledge of the senses and the emotions. Further, as Rich goes on in "Valediction" (Will) to actualize her aesthetic vision, to depict this ever-shifting energy complex called "the moment of change", she is again unsuccessful. In this final poem, as the poet attempts to move beyond the rigid structures of language which she believes cannot express the body, her vision of nature becomes not only devoid of experiential associations, but also almost incomprehensible. Her use of concrete images such as "hair, glacier, flashlight" (Will, p.50) is meaningless because such a depiction of "the moment of change" has virtually no contextual framework. What has become apparent in this final poem in Rich's definition of nature is that, as she tries to tap a more and more essential human source, as she moves toward an increasingly purer conception of nature, her definition becomes so insular, so personal that it cannot be communicated. Nature, in its pure form, seems to be antithetical to culture.

However, the poems that seemed to most significantly represent Rich's articulation of a feminist perspective were "5:30 a.m.", "Planetarium" and "Tear Gas." The foundation of Rich's conception of "thinking through the body", "the miracle and paradox of the female body",[1] is the complex issue explored in "5:30 a.m." The woman's understanding of her body -- her sense of its vitality and energy, and at the same time, her knowledge that it is the cause of her cultural fate as potential mother -- is central to Rich's feminist vision. In "Planetarium", she begins re-visioning the meaning of woman's body and its relation to nature and culture. Caroline Herschel, the female astronomer depicted in the poem, is no longer a victim of her biology. Instead, the fact that she is "ruled by the moon" (Will, p.13), and that she responds to her own "heart sweating through [her] body" (Will, p.14), is culturally valuable, for these characteristics, intrinsic to her female sensibility, have contributed to her resources as an astronomer. Thus the female connection with nature, now re-visioned as intuition and intelligence, is illustrated by Rich to be culturally valuable. In "Tear Gas", the notion of "thinking through the body" embraces emotion. Symbolized by the tear, emotion can, the poet suggests, contribute to both personal and political change. Further, the expression of emotion represents one of the poet's first attempts not only to work against the problematic influence of patriarchal culture, but also to separate the authentic experience of "self" from the cultural prescription. The woman who is transformed into a bird in this poem is an emblem of the potential for change that is made possible as woman thinks through her body, expressing her emotions, her natural reaction to patriarchy.

Having explored female intuition and emotion in the early phase of her work, it is the female unconscious that Rich next considers as a source for "thinking through the body." In Diving Into The Wreck, in the exploration of conscious and unconscious dimensions of experience, Rich is, it seems, still working as she was in "Images" with the idea of an original or elemental human source that exists separately from the social or culturally-imposed consciousness.

She now, therefore, conceives of "thinking through the body" as the process of moving beyond "patriarchal" thinking and tapping instead the bisexual unconscious. In this phase of Rich's exploration, the bisexual or androgynous unconscious is the natural state of the psyche, which has been blocked by cultural conditioning.

In the earlier part of her investigation in Diving Into The Wreck, in "Trying To Talk With A Man", the poet illustrates the sterility of the masculine consciousness; in "The Mirror In Which Two Are Seen As One", the self-destructiveness of the stereotypical female's way of thinking is explored. Rich also indicates the problems involved in moving beyond conventional and accepted modes of perception to define or discover a separate feminist consciousness in "When We Dead Awaken." However, as the poet attempts in the title poem, "Diving", to depict the bisexual psyche, she fails to provide us with the images necessary to transform our conceptions of consciousness; ironically enough, as Rich depicts the scene of the wreck and the diver, together symbolizing the core of being, it is as though this vision of human potential were the scene of any underwater exploration. In declaring that the female explorer is merman/mermaid, compass and wreck, as well as diver (Diving, p.24), Rich is, it seems, attempting to depict an integrated female consciousness. However, these uninspiring parts of the psyche, all associated with underwater exploration, lack the force and complexity that the portrait of the particularistic consciousness depicted in the later poems successfully embodies.

The important development in this phase is Rich's depiction of the female unconscious in "Waking In The Dark" (Diving). The central role of the body in "5:30 a.m.", the intuition depicted in

"Planetarium", the value of emotion expressed in "Tear Gas" now come together in "Waking In The Dark" in the vision of a highly energized feeling-thinking being, swimming, diving, touching, vitally alive, at one with the environment which is a merging of natural and cultural realms. This conception of "thinking through the body" is one in which the energies of the self have broken free of the "casts" of patriarchal thought. In such a dynamic state of being, growth, change, and love are tangible possibilities.

However, "Waking In The Dark" is a dream, as the poet admits in its concluding lines. In her attempt to actualize the dynamic vision of the female self created in "Waking", in the poems of The Dream of A Common Language and A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far, Rich focusses on the strengths of the female community in the actual world. The elemental human source that Rich conceived as "the moment of change" in "Images" and as the bisexual unconscious in "Diving Into The Wreck" now has an "outer" but equally powerful manifestation; the authentic experience of women, an experience denied or ignored by patriarchy, is now the basic source of "thinking through the body." Rich's decision to focus on and develop the experiences of women in the actual world has a number of effects on her portrait of the feminist consciousness: Rich articulates the ideals of feminism; she clarifies and makes realistic her conception of "thinking through the body" as a feeling-thinking response to an actual experience. Finally, the notion of woman's physicality, so central to the identity of the feminist consciousness, is now expanded beyond the body to encompass an entire way of life. Female power, directly related to woman's physicality, is no longer a biological trap. Instead, in the female community, physicality is re-conceived to mean not only the recognition of one's physical and emotional needs, but one's relationship to the world.

One of the central poems illustrating Rich's vision, and one crucial in the evolving definition of the feminist consciousness,is "Origins and History of Consciousness" (Dream). The birth of the feminist self occurs when woman breaks with conventional ways of thinking and feeling, determining instead to act on her own needs and perceptions. This process of defining and responding to an authentic self is embodied in the depiction of the poet-persona,who rejects heterosexuality, fulfilling her sexual needs through lesbianism. However, the woman in the poem acknowledges that a response to the needs of the body is only the first step in the birth of a radical new self. She must now expand her awareness of physicality; she must re-interpret it as the ability to embrace another person, not only sexually, but in the entirety of her/his being. Such trust and acceptance of another person is, in the poet's view, a powerful, peculiarly female, ability.[2] It is also a complete break from patriarchal conceptions of power as domination and force.

The "Love Poems" (Dream) continue to concentrate on the female power inherent in lesbianism. As the basis of "thinking through the body", lesbianism symbolizes a process in which the actual needs of self and other are understood and fulfilled. Further, the lesbian couple, whose experience has not been "imagined" by culture or literature, are simultaneously living out and creating a new vision of life. Ultimately, the "Love Poems" seem to lay down the precepts on which ~~the~~ lesbian mythos is founded. It is a vision in which body and mind are integrated; and Rich's inspirational imagery also succeeds in uniting inner and outer worlds. For example, the poet's declaration in Poem I that the lesbian couple will live "like trees" (Dream, p.25) is her statement of the need to balance all aspects of life, however seemingly irreconcilable. Hence the "animal passion" of the women is not only a physical manifestation; it gives them the strength to survive pollution and pornography: it allows them to "exuberantly bud" with re-vitalized conceptions of life. Further, the women in the poem not only acknowledge and attempt to fulfill their personal needs and dreams; they also try to live "inseparable" from the public world, accepting of what is beyond their control. Another central image, "the slow-picked, halting traverse of a pitch" (Dream, p.35), again suggests the integration of body and mind, and of personal and public worlds. The momentum and energy that this image suggests is symbolic of the lesbian decision to pay "fierce attention" to the particularities of everyday life. Such a commitment means constant awareness of all aspects of self; it also signifies a way of living so attuned to the details of everyday experience that the ordinary becomes a "miracle."

As Rich's poetic vision moves from the lesbian relationship in the "Love Poems" to the actual world where such feminist values must be put into practice, the poet encounters a culture in which knowledge and expression of self is discouraged, in which openness and acceptance can be dangerous. She now chooses to draw as much strength as she can from faith. "Transcendental Etude" (Dream), Rich's most ideal vision of the power and meaning of female physicality, takes the values articulated in the "Love Poems" and incorporates them into a portrait of the integrated, energized feminist consciousness. The beginnings of the holistic consciousness depicted in "Diving Into The Wreck" now culminates in "Etude" in the multi-faceted awareness of the woman, at one with her body, who understands her place in natural and cultural worlds. Thus "thinking through the body" is illustrated to be female awareness, highly attuned to the "acute particularity" of life; faith is not transcendent but founded on actual experience:

> pulling the tenets of a life together
> with no mere will to mastery,
> only care for the many-lived, unending
> forms in which she finds herself,
> becoming now the shard of broken glass
> slicing light in a corner, dangerous
> to flesh, now the plentiful, soft leaf
> that wrapped round the throbbing finger, soothes the wound;
> and now the stone foundation, rockshelf further
> forming underneath everything that grows. (Dream, p.77)

The vision of profound integration that "Etude" depicts is highly inspirational; however, it is made possible by the poet's disregard for certain harsher realities, to which she directs her attention in "Turning The Wheel" (Patience). Here, in the portrayal of the plight of the native Indian women, Rich tries to strike a balance between ideal and real worlds. The process of "thinking through the body" now is expanded to signify the confrontation between the aware individual and the limitations as well as the possibilities of her environment. In this eight-part poem the Grand Canyon symbolizes female strength. Just as this natural world has been conquered by man, so too femaleness, grounded in woman's biology, and closely linked to the natural world, has been constantly undermined, and "routed backward" (Patience, p.56) by patriarchal culture. The poet-persona, who is on a journey to the Canyon, decides that she cannot face the sight awaiting her at the end of the trip. The canyon, so enduring, yet so horribly desecrated by the processes of civilization, is too painful to confront. Hence the vision of the feminist consciousness at the end of the poem is one in which the afflictions of patriarchy are a very-present reality, and a reality that it would be foolish, even fatal, to deny. There is, however, some residual optimism expressed in the poem. The Canyon is described as "the face / of annihilating and impersonal time" (Patience, p.59) -- an image of the essential, infinite strength of femaleness; further, the poet-persona, in her own life, provides an example of the life-affirming potential of feminism: firstly, throughout the poem Rich has performed the valuable task of re-visioning the history of native women; secondly, in the poet-persona's mind throughout this drive, her lover has been ever-present. The power of their relationship sustains the poet; it offers hope and stability in a life in which many obstacles must be faced.

The movement from personal ideals to more public realities, mirrored in the relationship between "Transcendental Etude" and "Turning the Wheel", can be seen to be the basis of the feminist process of "thinking through the body". While the qualities such as intuition, emotion and particularism were acknowledged as central to feminist awareness in each phase of poetic exploration, underlying this development was the process of waxing and waning creative and prophetic energies, a process so evident in the movement from "Etude" to "Wheel." It seems that, whether in the re-visioning of nature, or bisexuality, or the female community, this sense of irrepressible energy, tempered by the forces of the actual world, has established a kind of momentum which is itself intrinsic to "thinking through the body."

This process usually began with the poet's concern with a specific problem of perception in the outer or public world. As

Rich undertook to re-vision the conventional conception of nature, bisexuality or physicality, it seems that she was inevitably led to a solution highly inspirational and deeply personal. Thus the re-definition of nature resulted in "the moment of change"; the exploration of the mind culminated in the bisexual psyche; the understanding of community reached a crescendo in the poet's hymn of faith in "Transcendental Etude." While this final vision, affirming the acknowledgement of one's actual as opposed to conditioned needs, is the poet's most practical and accessible definition of "thinking through the body", it is still, like the earlier conceptions of a pristine human source underlying our conditioned thinking, a personal realization, and one that is close to inapplicable in the actual world.

However, Rich's honesty, her integrity, her commitment to her vision of "thinking through the body" as a total awareness of self and other, leads her to counter the seeming ease of her feminist ideals with the hard facts of living in the world. Hence Rich concludes her exploration of "thinking through the body" with the realization that while female potential is not entirely ineffective in the actualities of daily living, this dynamic energy is constantly "routed backward." It is as if Rich's final realization is, as the Grand Canyon illustrates, that there is a bedrock of human vitality that we must, for our spiritual and physical survival, remain in "touch" with; yet our participation in the world as it presently exists requires that we realize the restrictions and limitations imposed by contemporary culture.

Hence, the exploration of "thinking through the body" has, in moving from phase to phase, gradually coalesced into a total vision.

The inspirational poems, "Planetarium", "Waking in the Dark" and "Transcendental Etude" established the central relation between the emotive aspects of self and nature; the poems of the actual world, inseparable from the more idealistic poems, illustrate the process of balancing inner and outer knowledge, ideal and real worlds, made possible by awareness of the body and openness to its corrective effects. Rich's ultimate conception of the feminist consciousness, the process by which thought is augmented by the knowledge of the senses and the emotions, has, then, been realized as the poet brings feminist ideals into the patriarchal world.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in On Lies, Secrets and Silence (NewYork: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), p.35; My use of hyphenated words (such as re-define and re-conceive) conforms with Rich's acknowledgement that "re" must be emphasized.

[2] Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," pp.40-45.

[3] By "patriarchy" I am referring to Rich's definition in "The Antifeminist Woman," On Lies, Secrets and Silence, p.78: "I would like to clarify here the way in which I am using the term patriarchy. By it I mean to imply not simply the tracing of descent through the father . . . but any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms. (It is characteristic of patriarchal thinking that these realms are regarded as separate and mutually exclusive.)" The following definitions are based on Rich's Foreword, On Lies, Secrets and Silence, pp.9-18. "Male" thinking is to be understood as the extent to which men -- and women -- are what Rich describes as "embodiments of the patriarchal idea." "Female" thinking is used interchangeably with "feminist" to mean a reaction, by women, against "the passivity of the twentieth century mind." It is the need to define an "authentic" female self. Rich defines this process of discovery: "To question everything. To remember what it has been forbidden even to mention. To come together telling our stories, to look afresh at, and then describe for ourselves art and literature. . . . To do this kind of work takes a capacity for constant active presence, a naturalist's attention to minute phenomena, for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangements, decoding difficult and complex messages . . . of the past."

[4] Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," p.47.

[5] Nancy Milford, "This Woman's Movement," in Adrienne Rich's Poetry, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), pp.197-201.

[6] Nancy Milford, "This Woman's Movement," p.202.

[7] Marianne Whelchel, "Mining the 'Earth-Deposits': Women's History in Adrienne Rich's Poetry," in Reading Adrienne Rich, Reviews and Re-visions, 1951-81, ed. Jane Roberta Cooper (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p.57.

[8] Adrienne Rich, "Three Conversations," interview with Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and A. Gelpi, in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry*, ed. Barbara Gelpi and A. Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), pp. 114-119.

[9] Jane Vanderbosch, "Beginning Again," in *Reading Adrienne Rich, Reviews and Re-Visions 1951-81*, ed. Jane Roberta Cooper (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), pp.125-135.

[10] Wendy Martin, "A Nurturing Ethos in the Poetry of Adrienne Rich," in *Reading Adrienne Rich, Reviews and Revisions 1951-81*, p. 167.

[11] Mary J. Carruthers, "The Re-vision of the Muse: Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Judy Grahn, Olga Broumas," *Hudson Review*, 36 (Summer 1983), p.294.

[12] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), p.39.

[13] Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference* , ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.17.

[14] Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward An Understanding of 'l'Ecriture féminine'," *Feminist Studies* 7, no.2 (Summer 1981), p.253.

[15] Adrienne Rich, "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children" in *The Will To Change* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), pp.15-18.

[17] Hélène Cixous, Le Sexe ou la tête?" Les Cahiers du GRIF 13 (October 1976), trans. Domna C. Stanton, "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection," in *The Future of Difference*, ed. Eisenstein and Jardin (Bernard College: G.K. Hall, 1980), p. 73.

[18] Adrienne Rich, "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman," in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, p.248.

[19] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Marks and Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p.256.

[20] See: Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing The Body: Towards an Understanding of 'L'Ecriture Feminine'"; Domna Stanton, "Language Revolution: The Franco-Americn Dis-Connection."

[21] Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p.6.

[22] Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.6.

[23] Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp.55,56.

[24] Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp.11,23.

[25] Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born, p.284.

[26] Mary Daly, Beyond God The Father (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp.8-9.

[27] Paul A. Bové, Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.229.

[28] Paul Bové, Destructive Poetics, p.241.

[29] Charles Olson, lines from "The Kingfisher" cited in The Will To Change (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1971), Epigraph.

[30] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in Selected Writings of Charles Olson (New York: New Directions Books, 1966), p.17.

[31] Albert Gelpi, "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change," in Adrienne Rich's Poetry, p.144.

[32] Adrienne Rich, "Poetry and Experience: Statement at a Poetry Reading, 1964," in Adrienne Rich's Poetry, p.89.
Bové, Destructive Poetics, pp.248-249.

[33] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," p.16.

[34] Paul Christensen, Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p.71.

[35] Bové, Destructive Poetics, pp.242-243,252-254.

[36] Bové, Destructive Poetics, p.219.

[37] Adrienne Rich, "Origins and History of Consciousness," in The Dream of a Common Language (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), pp.7-9.

[38] Bové, Destructive Poetics, pp.219-255.

Chapter I: Re-Visioning Nature

[1] Adrienne Rich, Leaflets: Poems 1965-68 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969); hereafter cited as Leaflets.

[2] Adrienne Rich, The Will To Change: Poems 1968-1970 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971); hereafter cited as Will.

[3] see Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), pp.21-109.

[4] Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), p.285.

[5] Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in Woman, Culture and Society, ed. Michele Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 74-75.

[6] Ortner, p. 75

[7] Ortner, p. 81

[8] Ortner, pp. 84-85

[9] Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p.144.

[10] Adrienne Rich, "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman," in On Lies, Secrets and Silence (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), p.248.

[11] Adrienne Rich, "5:30 a.m." in Leaflets, p.31. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[12] Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, The Madwoman In The Attic (Boston: Yale University Press, 1979), p.89.

[13] Adrienne Rich, "Abnegation" in Leaflets, p.38. Al subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[14] Adrienne Rich, "Planetarium" in The Will To Change, pp.13-14. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[15] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-Vision" in On Lies, Secrets and Silence, p.38.

[16] Judith McDaniel, "Reconstituting the World: The Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich," in Reading Adrienne Rich, Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p. 11.

[17] Adrienne Rich, "Tear Gas," in Poems Selected and New 1950-1974 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), pp.139-141. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text. I have selected "Tear Gas" from this volume because its dates correspond to those of the other poems in this phase of Rich's work.

[18] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (New York, 1958), p.8.

[19] Adrienne Rich, "Images for Godard," in The Will To Change, pp. 47-49. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[20] John Donne, "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" in John Donne: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (London, England: Nonesuch, 1962), p.36.

[21] Donne, "A Valediction," p.36.

[22] Adrienne Rich, "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," in The Will To Change, p.50. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

Chapter II: Towards a Bisexual Unconscious

[1] Adrienne Rich, Diving Into The Wreck: Poems 1971-1972 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973); hereafter cited as Diving.

[2] Chantal Chawaf, "Linguistic Flesh," trans. Yvonne Rochette-Ozello, in New French Feminisms, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schoken Books, 1981), p.177.

[3] Chawaf, "Linguistic Flesh," p.177.

[4] Helene Cixous, "Entretien avec Francoise van Rossum-Guyon," Revue des sciences humaines, p.490, trans. Domna C. Stanton, "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection" in The Future of Difference, ed. Eisenstein and Jardin (Barnard College: G.K. Hall, 1980), p.77.

[5] Cixous, p.78.

[6] Adrienne Rich, "Three Conversations," an interview with Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, in Adrienne Rich's Poetry, ed. Gelpi and Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), p.113.

[7] Adrienne Rich, "Three Conversations," pp.112-117.

[8] Adrienne Rich, "Three Conversations," pp.113.

[9] Alison M. Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), pp.38-39.

[10] Jane Vanderbosch, "Beginning Again," in Reading Adrienne Rich, Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81, ed. Jane Roberta Cooper (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p.113.

[11] Hélène Cixous, in an interview with V.A. Conley, by V.A. Conley, Helene Cixous: Writing the Feminine (Lincoln,London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p.131.

[12] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in New French Feminisms, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabella Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p.254.

[13] Adrienne Rich, "Images for Godard," in The Will To Change (New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1971), p.49.

[14] Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p.53.

[15] Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, quoted by Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.55.

[16] Daly, Introduction, Gyn/Ecology, p.1-11.

[17] Adrienne Rich, "Trying To Talk With A Man," in Diving Into The Wreck, pp.3-4. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[18] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," in Diving Into The Wreck, pp.5-7. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[19] Adrienne Rich, "The Mirror In Which Two Are Seen As One," in Diving Into The Wreck, pp.14-16. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[20] Susan Van Dyne, "The Mirrored Vision of Adrienne Rich," Modern Poetry Studies 8 (Autumn 1977), p.153.

[21] Van Dyne, p.154.

[22] Adrienne Rich, "Waking In The Dark," in Diving Into The Wreck, pp.7-10. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[23] Suzanne Juhasz, Naked and Fiery Forms (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p.295.

[24] Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into The Wreck," in Diving Into The Wreck, pp.22-24. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[25] Mary Daly, Pure Lust (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p.116.

[26] Rosemary Tonks, "Cutting The Marble," in Reading Adrienne Rich, p.235.

[27] Tonks, "Cutting," p.234.

Chapter III: Women in Community

[1] Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of A Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978); hereafter cited as *Dream*.

[2] Adrienne Rich, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-1981* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981); hereafter cited as *Patience*.

[3] Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, pp.62-63.

[4] Adrienne Rich, interview with Ellie Bulkin, cited by Jane Vanderbosch, "Beginning Again," in *Reading Adrienne Rich, Reviews and Re-visions, 1951-81*, ed. Jane Roberta Cooper (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p.113.

[5] Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), p.86.

[6] see Adrienne Rich, "Three Conversations," an interview with Gelpi and Gelpi, in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry*, ed. Gelpi and Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), p.118.

[7] Adrienne Rich, Foreword, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), p.17.

[8] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), p.285.

[9] Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp.285-286.

[10] Adrienne Rich, "Power," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, p.3. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[11] Claire Keyes, "The Angels Chiding: Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law," in *Reading Adrienne Rich*, p.30.

[12] Adrienne Rich, "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev," in *The Draam of A Common Language*, pp.7-9. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[13] Marianne Whelchel, "Mining the 'Earth-Deposits': Women's History in Adrienne Rich's Poetry," in *Reading Adrienne Rich*, p.59.

[14] Adrienne Rich, "Origins and History of Consciousness," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, pp.7-9. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[15] Mary J. Carruthers, "The Re-vision of the Muse: Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Olga Broumas," *Hudson Review*, 36 (Summer 1983), p.294.

[16] Carruthers, "The Re-vision," p.294.

[17] Adrienne Rich, "Love Poem I," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, p.25. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[18] Adrienne Rich, "Love Poem XIII," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, p.31. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[19] Joanne Feit Diehl,"'Cartographies of Silence': Rich's *Common Language* and The Woman Poet," in *Reading Adrienne Rich*, p.98.

[20] Adrienne Rich, "Love Poem XVII," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, pp.33-34. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[21] Adrienne Rich, "Love Poem XIX," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, p.34. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[22] Adrienne Rich, Foreword, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, p.13.

[23] Carruthers, *Re-vision*, p.296.

[24] Adrienne Rich, "A Woman Dead In Her Forties," in *The Dream of A Common Language*, pp.53-58. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[25] Jane Vanderbosch, "Beginning Again," in *Reading Adrienne Rich*, p.115.

[26] Adrienne Rich, "Transcendental Etude", in *The Dream of A Common Language*, pp.72-77. All further references will appear in the text.

[27] Adrienne Rich, "Culture and Anarchy," in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, pp.10-15. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[28] Adrienne Rich, "Turning The Wheel," in A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far, pp.52-59. All subsequent references to this poem will appear in the text.

[29] Adrienne Rich, Notes, A Wild Patience, p.62.

Conclusion

[1] Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born, p.284.

[2] Adrienne Rich, "Three Conversations," p.118.

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